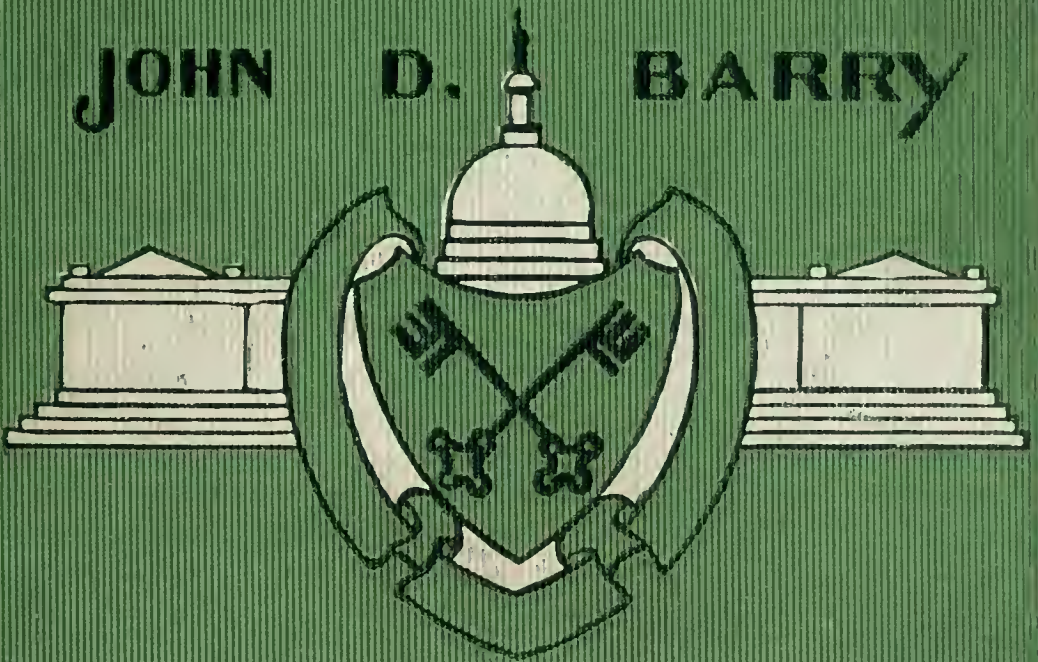


The Congressman's Wife

BY

JOHN D. BARRY



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THE CONGRESSMAN'S WIFE





"'We've come back to have another little talk with you, Mr. Briggs.'"

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The Congressman's Wife

A Story of American Politics

BY

Yo
Lol
c
JOHN D. BARRY

AUTHOR OF

"A DAUGHTER OF THESPIA," Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY ROLLIN G. KIRBY



1903

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Preface

IN this story my aim has not been primarily to depict conditions in American politics. This work has already been done far better than I could do it by several writers, among others, by Mr. Brand Whitlock, whose novel, "The Thirteenth District," shows a remarkable insight and fidelity. I have merely used a familiar condition for the purpose of tracing some of its purely social and human complications. The contrast between the standards a man may follow in public life or in business and those he maintains at home, with his wife and children, seemed to me to afford material worth the attention of the story-writer.

J. D. B.

July, 1903.

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*“Naught’s gained, all’s spent,
When our desire is got without content.”*

THE CONGRESSMAN'S WIFE

I

“YES, Washington is never finer than now.” The white-haired Senator stood at the top of the steps of the Capitol and looked benignly across the city. The air was heavy with the rich odor of Spring. The trees were putting out their tender green leaves.

Douglas Briggs nodded. “It will be fine for a few weeks. Then we shall have to send our families away,” he said, adding quickly, with a glance at the Capitol, “that is, if they keep us here.”

“It soon becomes unbearable, the heat,” the old gentleman agreed. “We always try to get away before June. I suppose you have to be careful about your little ones.”

“Yes; and then Mrs. Briggs is rather run down, I think. It has been a hard Winter for her—so much entertaining.”

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"It's wonderful how they stand it," the Senator said, musingly. A delicate moisture had broken out on his smooth, fine face. "But I sometimes think the women bear it better than the men. When I first came here I went about a good deal. But that was more than a quarter of a century ago. The life was simpler then; though, coming from the country as I did, it seemed gay enough. There's poor Braddon from Kentucky. You knew him, of course. I went down to his funeral the other day. It was this infernal entertaining that killed him—too many dinners. The last time I talked with him he told me he had eaten twenty-three public dinners in something less than three weeks. The wonder is that it doesn't kill more of them. I suppose it does—only we say they died of something else." He looked curiously at Briggs through his big gold-framed spectacles. "How do you stand it?" he asked. Without waiting for a reply, he went on: "But you youngsters don't mind those things as we old fellows do."

Douglas Briggs laughed. "Oh, I'm not so young, Senator. I turned forty more than two years ago."

"But you look very young," the Senator in-

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sisted, amiably. "And I'm always hearing of you at the great dinners. I see your speeches in the newspapers."

"Oh, I *speak* at the dinners," Briggs replied, smiling, "but I don't eat at them."

"No?" the old gentleman asked, softly.

"That is, I never think of eating all they put before me. If I did, I should have shared Bradon's fate long ago. My first Winter of public dinners gave me a fierce attack of gout. Now when I dine out I taste the soup and I eat the roast and the salad. The rest of the dinner I pass by."

The Senator's eyes twinkled. "Very sensible, very sensible," he said. He patted Briggs on the shoulder with the kindly patronage of the older man. "That's why you keep your color and your clear eye. That's right. That's right." He shook his head and his face wrinkled with pleasure. "I only wish we had a few more sensible young fellows like you in Congress."

They clasped hands at the foot of the steep flight of steps. "I hope we shall see you to-night," said Briggs.

The Senator shook his head. "Oh, no; those dissipations aren't for us. We keep away from

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crowds. But we'd like to see your new house," he added, pleasantly. "My wife and I will look in some afternoon."

Douglas Briggs walked down the street with a glow of amusement and pleasure. He felt proud of his friendship with one of the oldest and most distinguished Senators in Washington. He had reached the age, too, when he enjoyed being treated like a young man; it gave him reassurance. As he passed Congressman Burton's house he noticed a line of carriages extending far up the street. Then he remembered that the Burtons were having a reception. "I ought to have asked Helen to go," he thought. Then he was glad he had not asked her. She would need all her strength for the night; he had been putting too many burdens on her, of late.

This afternoon he was in one of his moods of fine physical exhilaration. He had had an exciting day in the House; but now he turned from all thought of care and looked forward with a boy's delight to the evening. His wife had asked a few people to dinner to celebrate their establishment in their new house, and for the reception that would follow she had invited nearly everyone in Washington that they knew. As he ap-

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proached the house he viewed it with a glow of satisfaction. He had secured one of the most desirable corner lots in Washington, and Hanscomb, whom he considered the best architect in the country, had built on it a structure that Briggs proudly considered an ornament to the city. It would be associated with him as other houses were associated with men conspicuous in Washington life.

On the sidewalk Michael, the servant whom Douglas Briggs had employed ever since becoming a house-holder in Washington, was supervising the arranging of the carpet on the steps and the hanging of the awning.

"Well, Michael, how goes it?" Briggs asked, pleasantly.

"All right, sir. The back of the work is broken," Michael replied, with a grin. He brushed down his thick red hair and rubbed his hand over the perspiration on his forehead.

"Have those men come from the caterer's?"

"The naygurs, sir? They arrived an hour ago, an' ye'd think they owned the place."

"Well, let them own it while they're here," said Briggs, severely, apprehensive of Michael's great fault, a fondness for interfering with other servants and making trouble.

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"Div'l the word I've had with 'em, sir!" Michael exclaimed with a look of scorn.

"Very well!" Briggs commented, severely. He was fond of Michael, whom he knew he could trust; but he had to be severe with the fellow.

When Briggs entered, a young girl met him in the hall. "Oh, here you are! I've been watching for you all the afternoon. Why didn't you come home before, you naughty man?"

She put her arms on his shoulders, and he bent forward to be kissed. "I couldn't," Briggs explained; "I've been too busy."

"Oh, Guy," the girl cried, running to the broad staircase at the back of the hall, "Uncle Doug has come." She turned swiftly to her uncle. "Oh, you should have seen us work this afternoon, Guy and me! We've been helping Mrs. Farnsworth with the flowers. I've decorated the dining-room all myself." She seized Douglas Briggs by the arm and tried to drag him with her. "Come along and see."

He drew his arm away gently. "I mustn't now, Fanny. I'll see it by-and-by. I ought to get ready for dinner. Where's your aunt?"

"Aunt Helen's in the drawing-room. She has a caller, I think."

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Briggs frowned. "Hasn't she taken a rest?"

Fanny shook her head and looked serious. "I tried to make her, but she wouldn't. She said there were too many things to do. But Guy and I were attending to everything," she concluded, with importance.

Briggs turned away and smiled. "Children awake?" he asked, as he removed his coat.

"M'm—h'm. Been playing all the afternoon. Miss Munroe's been a brick. As soon as she got Jack quiet she came down and helped Guy and me decorate the ballroom. Oh, we had the loveliest——"

Briggs had turned away absent-mindedly and started up the stairs. As he passed the door of the drawing-room he heard a rustle of skirts, and a sharp voice exclaimed:

"Why, there's your husband now!"

He stopped and turned back. "Oh, Mrs. Burrell, how do you do?" he said, abruptly. He extended his hand, and the old lady grasped it with enthusiasm.

"I've been all over your house," she said. "It's simply the loveliest place I've ever seen. I've just been telling your wife," she went on,

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"that I don't see how Paradise can be any better than this."

Briggs smiled. Then he turned to his wife and kissed her on the cheek.

"Well, it does me good to see you do that!" Mrs. Burrell declared. "It's the only real home-like thing I've seen since I come to Washington." She took a long breath. "I was saying to Mr. Burrell yesterday that if we didn't know you and Mrs. Briggs we'd think there was no such thing as home life in Washington."

"Oh, there's a lot of it," Briggs asserted, jocularly. "Only they keep it dark."

"It seems to me there's nothing but wire-pulling, wire-pulling, everybody trying to get ahead of everybody else. It makes me sick. Still, I suppose I'm doing a little of that myself just now," she went on, with a nervous laugh. "What do you suppose I come here for to-day, Mr. Briggs? I ought to be ashamed bothering your wife just when she's going to have a big party. But I knew it would just break my girls' hearts if they didn't come to-night. So I've asked if I couldn't bring 'em."

"Quite right, quite right," said Briggs, cheerfully, but with the absent look still in his eyes.

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Mrs. Burrell was a large woman with hair that had turned to a color approximating drab and giving a suggestion of thinness belied by the mass at the back. She had a sharp nose and gray eyes, none the less keen because they were faded with years and from wearing glasses. Her skin, which seemed to have been tightly drawn across her face, bagged heavily under the eyes and dropped at the corners of the disappointed and complaining mouth. Douglas Briggs suspected that at the time of her marriage she had been a typical New England old maid. If she had been more correct in her speech he would have marked her for a former school-teacher. As she talked it amused him to note the flashes of brightness in her eyes behind the black-rimmed glasses from which was suspended a gold chain, a touch of elegance which harmonized perfectly with the whole eccentric figure. Briggs felt sorry for her and he felt glad for her: she was enjoying Washington without realizing how much passing enjoyment she gave to the people she met.

"It was a mistake, their not receiving cards," Helen Briggs explained. "I know their names were on the list."

"Oh, those mistakes are always happening,"

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Mrs. Burrell replied, greatly relieved now that she had got what she wanted. "Why, when we had our coming-out party for our oldest girl there was at least three families in Auburn that wouldn't look at me. How I happened to forget to invite 'em I couldn't understand, to save my life. But I didn't try to explain. It was no use. I just let it go."

Douglas Briggs sighed. Mrs. Burrell represented the type of woman before whom he had most difficulty in maintaining his air of confidential friendliness. For her husband, the shrewd old business man from Maine, who was serving his first term in Congress, he felt a genuine liking. His weariness at this moment prompted him to make one of his pleasant speeches. When most bored he always tried hardest to be agreeable. "There was no need of your asking for invitations for to-night," he said. "We hope you know us well enough to bring your daughters without invitations."

Mrs. Burrell softened. Her sharp little gray eyes grew moist. "Well, I think you're just as good as you can be," she said. She looked vaguely about, as if not knowing what to say. "Well, it is lovely!" she went on. "It's splendid having

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these big entries. They're just as good as rooms. And those lovely tapestries on the wall downstairs—where in the world did you get 'em?"

"They were bought for us by a dealer in New York," Briggs explained, patiently. He wondered how long Mrs. Burrell could stand without moving. At that moment the old lady turned and offered her hand to Helen.

"Well, good-bye again. The girls will be waiting for me at the hotel. I guess they'll be glad."

As soon as Mrs. Burrell started down the stairs Douglas Briggs turned to his wife. "You must be tired, dear," he said. "You ought to have been resting this afternoon."

"Oh, no. I'm not tired, really." She let him take her hand and she smiled back into his face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing." He pressed her hand more tightly. "Only I'm glad to see you again, that's all."

He placed his left hand on her forehead and drew her head back. Then he kissed her on the lips.

She drew away from him with a smile. "We haven't much time. We have a great many things to do yet."

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"I must take a peep at the children," he said.
"I wonder if they're asleep yet."

"I think Miss Munroe is giving them their supper."

The children, who had recognized the footsteps, were at the door to meet them. Dorothy, a fat, laughing girl of seven, ran forward and threw herself into her father's arms, and Jack, two years younger, trotted after her.

"Oh, you big girl!" Briggs exclaimed, "you'll take all my breath away."

She kissed him again and again, laughing as his mustache tickled her face. Jack was tugging at her skirts, trying to pull her down.

"Let me! Let me!" he insisted.

Briggs placed Dorothy on the floor and took up the boy. "How are you to-day, sonny?" he asked, as he let the thick, yellow curls fall over his eyes.

"All right," Jack replied, contentedly.

"Been a good boy?"

Jack looked wistfully at the governess, a young woman with black hair, a bad complexion and a disappointed face, that always suggested to Briggs a baffled motherliness. He pitied all people over twenty-five who were not married. He valued

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Miss Munroe, but he often told her that she had no business taking care of other people's children; she ought to be taking care of her own.

"No, he hasn't!" shouted Dorothy. "He broke his whip, and when Miss Munroe took it away from him he cried and kicked."

"Oh—h—h!" said Jack's father, reproachfully.

"Well, it was my whip," Jack insisted.

"It's all right," Miss Munroe interrupted. "He said he was sorry."

Briggs walked into the nursery with Jack on his shoulder. Jack, who at once forgot his momentary disgrace, clung to his father's thick hair.

"Ow, you rascal, let go!" said Briggs. He sank slowly into a chair, and lifting the boy high in his arms, deposited him on his knee. Dorothy followed and climbed up on the other knee. She placed a forefinger between her teeth and looked admiringly at her father.

"Papa, is the President coming to-night?" she asked.

Douglas Briggs took her hand and drew the finger out of her mouth. "I've told you not to do that, dear," he said.

She jumped and pressed her head against her father's coat. "Well, is he?"

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"I think not," Briggs replied, with a smile.
"I'm not sure that we've invited him."

"Oh, how mean!"

"He doesn't go to parties," Jack scornfully explained, with superior intelligence.

"Well, he has parties himself," Dorothy insisted, indignantly.

Briggs extended his hand between them.
"There, there; that'll do. Never mind about the President."

"You're going to be President some day, aren't you, papa?" Jack ventured, with confidence. "Only I'd rather live here than in the White House."

"They say the White House isn't healthy," said Dorothy, repeating a remark she had heard over the stairs.

"Well, papa, when you live in the White House can't we come and stay in this house when we want to?" asked Jack.

Helen Briggs, who had been discussing with Miss Munroe a detail of the decoration for the evening, joined the group. "Jack thinks we'll have to move from this place to the White House," said Briggs. "He's worried."

Helen smiled. "It's time for Jack to go to bed."

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"Oh, no. Just another minute longer," Jack pleaded.

"I must go and dress," said Briggs. "Now, chicks, climb down." They obeyed promptly, but turned and made a simultaneous attack upon him. He endured their caresses for a moment; then he cried: "Now, that's enough, I think." He rose quietly and kissed them. "Go to sleep like good children," he said.

On the way to their room Helen remarked: "Jack is getting so lively Miss Munroe hardly knows what to do with him."

"Oh, he'll be all right," said Douglas. "I like to see a boy with some spirit in him."

An hour later Douglas Briggs entered the dining-room, followed by his wife. Fanny Wallace was already there, talking with Guy Fullerton.

"How do I look?" Fanny cried to her aunt, catching up her long gown. "Isn't it perfectly beautiful? Don't you just love those fleecy things? Won't dad be proud of his daughter?"

"You look very well, dear," said Helen, conservatively.

"Well, you're kind of nice yourself," Fanny remarked. "And doesn't the gentleman look

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grand?" she added, to her uncle. "Only," she went on, giving him a little push, "you mustn't let yourself get so fat." Then she glanced at Guy. "Do you suppose he'll be like that when he's forty?"

"I've had a list of guests prepared for the newspaper people," said Guy to Douglas Briggs. He liked to ignore Fanny's jokes when they reflected on his personal appearance. "It'll save a lot of time. And I've arranged to have them take supper in a room by themselves. They'll like that better."

Briggs, however, had turned to the servant, who had just come into the room. "Take the men up to the big room over the front door, Michael. That'll be the best place," he went on, to his wife. "And have you arranged about their hats and coats?"

"I've attended to all that, sir," Guy said, eagerly.

Briggs looked relieved. "Well, I guess we needn't worry."

Helen glanced up into his face. "I'm not going to worry," she said, with a smile.

"Is the Secretary of State really coming?" Fanny asked.

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"I believe so," her aunt replied.

"If he speaks to me I shall faint away. Ugh!" The girl walked over to Guy Fullerton. "You'll have to do all the talking if you sit near me. I shall be too scared to say a word. This is my first dinner, you know."

"You poor thing!" Guy began; but Fanny cut him short.

"Don't make stupid jokes, sir!"

Helen Briggs turned to the girl. "I'm only afraid you'll talk too much, Fanny."

"If she does, we'll send her from the table," said Briggs.

Fanny wrinkled her nose at her uncle. "That funny little Frenchman's to sit on my left," she said, turning to Guy. "Oh, I won't do a thing to him!"

"I want you to be particularly nice to young Clinton, of the British Embassy," Briggs replied. "He's a first-rate fellow, but very shy. I think perhaps you'll amuse him."

Guy at once looked uncomfortable. Fanny observed him, and laughed. "I expect to have a lovely time," she said, casting down her eyes demurely.

"Who's going to take you out?" Briggs

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asked, glancing first at Fanny and then at Guy.

"Mr. West," Guy promptly replied.

Briggs looked puzzled. "What did you put her with him for?"

Fanny smiled knowingly. "Perhaps because he thought I'd be out of danger," she said demurely.

Briggs turned away impatiently. "Well, don't you dare to flirt with him, Fanny. He's really dangerous."

Guy's face looked anxious. "It isn't too late to change the arrangement," he said, wistfully, and they all laughed.

"Is it true that Mr. West is so wicked, Uncle Doug?" Fanny asked. "The newspapers say awful things about him."

"Well, the newspapers say awful things about everybody. They say awful things about me."

"Then they tell great big lies," Fanny cried, rushing forward and throwing her arms around her uncle's neck.

"Fanny," Mrs. Briggs remonstrated, "you'll get your dress all ruffled."

"Well, never mind," said Fanny, philosophically, and she smiled at her uncle. "I'd just like

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to meet someone that had been talking about you."

"Gee, it's a good thing you aren't a man," Guy remarked with a shake of his head.

"Won't she be a terrible little boss when she gets married?" Briggs exclaimed, with a knowing look at the young fellow.

"I'm going to be just like Auntie," said Fanny, and Briggs laughed aloud.

"Then you'll have to begin to change mighty quick."

The door-bell rang and a few moments later the first guest appeared in the drawing-room. During the next few moments several other guests arrived and Fanny was kept busy helping her aunt to keep them amused until dinner was announced. The announcement was delayed by the tardiness of the Secretary of State, who was known for his punctuality in business and for his indifference and unpunctuality in social matters. When, finally, the great man entered, walking quickly but maintaining, nevertheless, an air of deliberateness and suavity, Fanny breathed a sigh of relief. She turned to Franklin West, who had taken his place beside her.

"I'm starving," she said.

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"You poor child." He looked down at her with his fine dark eyes.

"And yet I'm terribly frightened."

"At what?" he said with a smile.

"Oh, all these wonderful men with their queer wives. Why do great men marry such funny women, do you suppose?"

"Be careful, little girl," West whispered.

Fanny shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not very diplomatic, am I?"

"Perhaps you'll learn to be as you grow older," he said, smiling again. "Diplomacy usually comes with age. It's only the very young who can afford to be frank. It's one of the graces of youth."

Fanny flushed. "I believe you are making fun of me, Mr. West."

"Oh, no," West replied, gallantly. "I'm merely telling you the truth."

The butler had entered and announced dinner and the procession was about to start for the dining-room. "Don't you think this is positively *languishing*, Mr. West?" said Fanny, as she took the arm offered her, and when he laughed aloud, she went on: "It's been the dream of my life to go to a dinner-party." She sighed deeply. "And

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yet there's something sad when your dream is realized, isn't there?"

"Well, I must say you're complimentary, Miss Fanny," West exclaimed.

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I didn't mean anything personal to *you*."

"What did you mean then?"

"Well, I guess I mean that there won't ever be any first dinner-party for me again. I'm just foolish, that's all."

After helping Fanny in her seat, West took his place beside her. He had been bored on learning that this child was to be his table companion; now he felt somewhat amused.

"I can't say that any of my dreams have been realized," he remarked, unfolding his napkin.

"You poor thing!" Fanny cried. Then she looked searchingly at his face. "You don't show any very great disappointment."

Fanny glanced quickly around the table: many of the faces were partly concealed from her by the masses of roses and ferns in the centre. There was Guy, talking with that queer little woman from the Argentine Republic, the wife of an under-secretary or something. Fanny wondered vaguely how she had happened to be invited. Oh,

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she was supposed to be intellectual or literary or something like that. Then Fanny smiled at the thought of the way poor Guy would be bored. Suddenly she turned to Franklin West.

"Who do you think is the prettiest woman here?"

"The prettiest woman?" West repeated, gallantly, emphasizing the noun. "Well, I don't think I should have to hesitate long about that."

"Well, who?"

"Mrs. Douglas Briggs, of course."

Fanny's eyes rested affectionately on her aunt. "Of course," she agreed. "But somehow," she went on, "I never think about Auntie as pretty. I just think of her as good. I don't believe she ever had a mean thought or did a mean thing in her life. Don't you think she's perfectly lovely?" she asked, inconsistently. Fanny looked up into West's face and noticed that it had flushed deeply.

"Yes, she is perfectly lovely," he repeated in a low voice.

"Now, if I were a man I'd fall head over heels in love with her."

"And then what would happen?" West asked, without taking his eyes off Mrs. Briggs's face.

"Why, I'd marry her, of course."

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"And what would become of Mr. Briggs?"

"Uncle Doug?" Fanny asked in surprise.

"Oh, I'd have fallen in love long before he came along."

"But suppose you'd fallen in love after he came along?"

Fanny wrinkled her nose. "I don't like to suppose unpleasant things," she replied. "Anyway, there's only one man in the world good enough for her."

"Who's that?"

"The man that she married, of course," Fanny exclaimed.

The dinner proved to be a perfect success. When the great men at the table learned that it was Fanny Wallace's first dinner-party they paid her such attention that she let herself go completely and kept them laughing by her naïve impertinences. The sight of young Clinton gave Guy Fullerton deep relief; he knew that the blotched-faced, thin and anæmic Englishman, with the ponderous manner of the embryonic statesman, would appeal only to Fanny's sense of humor. Fanny, indeed, was the centre of interest throughout the dinner; even the great men's wives petted her. When the ladies left the table to go

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into the drawing-room Helen had a chance to whisper to her: "My dear, you've been splendid. I sha'n't dare give any more dinner-parties without you."

"Oh, aren't they lovely?" Fanny cried, rolling her eyes. "Only I talked so much I forgot all about eating anything. I'm actually hungry."

The guests for the reception began to arrive shortly after nine o'clock. Long before this hour, however, the sidewalk near the house was crowded with curiosity-seekers, in which the colored population of Washington was numerous represented. Guy hurried from point to point, giving directions to the servants, offering greetings, and showing his fine, white teeth in frank, boyish enjoyment of his importance. As the newspaper people came, he exaggerated his cordiality; some of the men he addressed by their first names. "You'll find the list of guests all ready for you, old man," he remarked, placing his hand on the shoulder of one of them, "in the little room just leading off the dining-room. Down there. And there's everything else you can want, there at the sideboard," he added, significantly, with the consciousness of being very much a man of the world. "I knew you newspaper people would like to have a place to yourselves."

II

“WELL, I guess I *am* mad! I’ve never been treated so in all my life!”

Miss Beatrice Wing swept indignantly down the stairs into the conservatory. The interior of the house, planned after the Colonial fashion, was filled with surprising little flights of steps and with delightful irregularities.

“Still, it was a very good supper,” said Mrs. McShane behind her. She kept hesitating before the younger woman’s elaborate train. Her voice was one of those plaintive little pipes that belong to many small and timid women. Compared with Miss Wing and her radiant millinery, she seemed shriveled and impoverished.

“Oh, what difference does it make, anyway?” This time the voice was loud and sonorous. It came from William Farley, Washington correspondent of the *New York Gazette*, a thick-set man with a face that was boyish in spite of the fine web

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of wrinkles around each eye. He looked the personification of amiability, and was plainly amused by the young woman's indignation.

Miss Wing sank into one of the wicker seats and proceeded to fan herself vigorously, throwing back her head and letting the light flash from the gems on her round, white neck. "Well, I believe in standing on your dignity."

"I didn't know we had any," said Farley, with a laugh.

Miss Wing turned to a young woman who was extravagantly dressed in a gray-flowered silk, and who had just followed Mrs. McShane down the steps. "Listen to that, will you, Emily? I once heard Mrs. Briggs say that she hated newspaper people," she added, to the group.

Farley looked down from the head of the steps and smiled pleasantly. "That doesn't sound like Mrs. Briggs!"

Miss Wing sat bolt upright and let her fan drop into her lap. "Well, if I had known we were going to be shoved off for supper to a side room like that, I'd never have come. I didn't come as a reporter, anyway."

"What did you come as?" Farley asked, as he slowly descended the stairs, brushing against

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the tall palms on either side. From the other rooms music came faintly, mingled with talk and laughter.

"I came as a friend of Congressman Briggs," Miss Wing replied, with spirit.

Farley took a seat at a small table beside the miniature fountain. In the little stream that ran through the grass goldfish were nervously darting. "Wasn't the invitation sent to the office?" He drew out some sheets of paper and proceeded to make notes. He had the air of not taking the discussion seriously. More important affairs were on his mind.

"No matter. It was addressed to me personally." Miss Wing turned for corroboration to Emily Moore, who had sunk into the seat near her.

"So was mine," Miss Moore echoed.

Farley smiled, without glancing up from his writing. "How about yours, Mrs. McShane?"

Mrs. McShane, who always looked frightened, seemed at this moment painfully conscious of the shabbiness of her black silk gown. But she managed to reply: "I found mine in my letter-box this afternoon."

"It had been sent to the paper, of course," Far-

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ley remarked, decisively, as if expecting no answer.

Mrs. McShane nodded. "I've never done anything like this before. I do the temperance column in the Saturday paper, and the news of the churches."

The young women exchanged glances.

"Oh, well," Farley remarked, cheerfully, "these ladies will help you out. I'm relying on them for the dresses myself."

Miss Wing and Miss Moore rose and walked to the farthest corner of the conservatory. By some physical expression they seemed to wish to indicate that a marked difference existed between themselves and the shabby, careworn little figure in black.

Mrs. McShane looked relieved. Her face brightened. "It's a beautiful reception, isn't it?" she said to Farley, in an awe-stricken voice.

Farley looked vaguely about the room, as if making an estimate. "Yes," he said, slowly. "It must have cost Briggs a tidy bit of money."

Mrs. McShane opened wide her eyes. "And the champagne!" she whispered.

Miss Wing, who had started to walk slowly back to the table, exclaimed to her companion:

The Congressman's Wife

"And we didn't have a chance to see anything!"

"Oh, well, you can go in after they've finished," Farley remarked, good-naturedly.

Miss Wing assumed an air of decision. "I shall complain to Congressman Briggs of the way we've been treated."

"Oh, let him alone," said Farley. "He's got enough on his mind. Besides, in our business it doesn't pay to be ruffled by little things."

"Well, I don't see why newspaper work should prevent us from keeping our self-respect!" Miss Wing exclaimed, excitedly. "To be treated like a lot of servants!"

"Or like people who have forced themselves in, without being invited!" Miss Moore added.

Farley, however, kept on writing. "To do newspaper work," he commented, with exasperating coolness, "you mustn't have any feelings."

"The people you meet certainly don't!" snapped Miss Moore.

Miss Wing turned in the direction of the drawing-room, where, from the sound of voices, most of the guests seemed to be gathering. "Well, I'd like to know who these people are, that they presume to treat us so," she said, speaking in a loud

The Congressman's Wife

voice, as if she wished to be overheard. "Who is Mrs. Briggs, anyway? And who are all this rag-and-bobtail? The Wings of Virginia have something back of them. They haven't got their respectability from political trickery, anyway."

Mrs. McShane, who had been sitting, with bewilderment in her eyes, as if hardly knowing what to do, suddenly appealed to Farley. "I've got to get my copy in by one o'clock at the latest," she said in a whisper. "It must be nearly twelve now."

"Come and get down to work, then, before anyone comes in here," Farley replied. "I suppose you have the list of guests that young Fullerton passed round?"

As Mrs. McShane and Farley bent over the table, the butler entered, bearing a tray covered with cups of coffee. Mrs. McShane and Farley took coffee, which they sipped as they worked. The others refused it. As Farley took his cup he said, "Good-evening, Michael," and the man smiled and replied, "Good-evening, sor."

"I feel like tearing up my list," said Miss Wing, as she held the printed slip in her gloved hand. "I see," she went on, addressing Miss Moore, "they've got the Westmorelands down.

The Congressman's Wife

Is Lady Westmoreland here?" she asked, as Michael was about to ascend the steps.

"She's been here, ma'am, but she went away before supper."

Miss Wing's lip curled. "Oh, well, they *got* her, didn't they?" Before Michael had time to vanish she cried: "And is Stone here?"

"Who, ma'am?" the servant asked, turning again. His manner subtly conveyed resentment and dislike.

Miss Wing repeated: "*Mr.* Stone."

"He's in the drawing-room, ma'am; I just saw him in there."

Miss Wing turned to her companion. "Just think of their having Stone here! Suppose we go and see if we can find him? I'd like to see how he looks in society. I shouldn't be surprised to find him in his shirt sleeves. Well, Congressman Briggs knows which side his bread is buttered on. He keeps solid with the Boss."

Farley stopped work for a moment. "I wonder who prepared this list!" he said to Mrs. McShane. "Good idea!"

"How do you happen to be doing society work, Mr. Farley?" the old woman asked.

Farley smiled. "Well, it is rather out of my

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line, I must admit. If I had to do this sort of thing very much I'd quit the business. But our little Miss Carey is sick, and she was afraid she'd lose her job if she didn't cover this."

The wistful look deepened in Mrs. McShane's face. "So you said you'd do it! You must have a kind heart, Mr. Farley. Oh, I wish they'd give a description of the dresses with the list of guests!" she added, despairingly. "It would save us a lot of bother."

"I've a good mind to fake my stuff about the frocks," Miss Wing interposed.

Mrs. McShane looked shocked. "But suppose your managing editor should find it out?"

"Pooh! What do editors know about frocks?" Miss Wing spoke with a fine superiority. "I've noticed that they always like my faked things best, anyway."

"You have a wonderful imagination, dear," Miss Moore remarked, admiringly.

"Well, I don't know how I'd ever get through my articles if I didn't. The last time I went over to New York I called on all the leading women tailors and dressmakers, and I couldn't get a thing out of them, and the next day I had to write five thousand words on the new Spring fashions."

The Congressman's Wife

Miss Moore rolled her eyes. "What in the world did you do?" she said, with an affectation of voice and manner that suggested years of practice.

Miss Wing smiled. "Well," she replied, after a moment, "I had a perfectly beautiful time writing that article. I made up everything in it. I prophesied the most extraordinary changes in women's clothes. And do you know, some of them have really come about since! I suppose some of the other papers copied my stuff. And then, I actually invented some new materials!"

The pupils of Miss Moore's eyes expanded in admiration. "I wish I had your nerve!" she said, earnestly.

Under the warmth of flattery Miss Wing began to brighten. "And what do you suppose happened?" she said, exultantly. "The paper had a whole raft of letters asking where those materials could be bought. One woman out in Ohio declared she'd been in New York, and she'd hunted everywhere to get the embossed silk that I'd described."

Farley smiled grimly. "That woman's going to get along in the world," he muttered to Mrs. McShane. "In five years she'll be a notorious

The Congressman's Wife

lobbyist, with a hundred thousand dollars in the bank."

By this time Miss Wing had tired of the isolation of the conservatory. The interest of the evening was plainly centred in the drawing-room. "Come, dear," she said, drawing her arm around Miss Moore's, "let's walk about and get a look at the people."

As the two women started to mount the steps they were met by Franklin West, whose smiling face suddenly lost and resumed its radiance as his eyes caught sight of them. The effect was not unlike that of the winking of an electric light. The women either did not observe, or they deliberately ignored the effect upon him of the encounter, or possibly they misinterpreted it. At any rate, it made no appreciable diminution of their own expression of pleasure.

Miss Wing extended her hand. "Why, how do you do, Mr. West?" Miss Moore only smiled; in the presence of her companion she seemed instinctively to reduce herself to a subordinate position.

Franklin West took the gloved hand, that gave a pressure somewhat more prolonged than the conventional greeting. "I'm delighted to see you

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here," he said, the radiance of his smile once more firmly established. His face, Miss Wing noticed, was unusually flushed. She suspected that he was ill at ease. As he spoke he showed his large white teeth, and his brown eyes, that would have been handsome but for their complete lack of candor, wore a friendly glow. Miss Wing considered West one of the most baffling men in Washington, and one of the most fascinating. His features were strong and bold; his chin would have been disagreeably prominent but for the good offices of his thick black mustache, which created a pleasant regularity of outline. His complexion was singularly clear for a man's, and he had noticeably long and beautiful hands. Miss Wing had often wondered how old he was. He might have been forty; he might have been fifty; he could easily have passed for a man of thirty-five. His was plainly one of those natures that turn a smiling front on life. In fact, Franklin West had long since definitely formulated an agreeable system of philosophy: he liked to say that it was far better for a man not to try to adjust circumstances to himself, but to adjust himself to circumstances; that, after all, was the only true secret of living, especially—but he usually made this comment to

The Congressman's Wife

himself alone—of living in a city like Washington. At this moment he was adjusting himself to a most unpleasant circumstance, for in his attitude toward women he had a few decided prejudices, one of the strongest of which was typified by the Washington woman correspondent.

“Where are you going?” he asked, when he had offered his hand to Miss Moore, vainly searching for her name in the catalogue of newspaper acquaintances. These newspaper people were great bores; but he must be civil to them.

“Well, we felt like going home,” Miss Wing pouted. “But now that you’re here, perhaps we’ll stay.”

West looked at her with an expression of exaggerated solicitude. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

“We’ve been neglected—shamefully,” Miss Wing replied.

“They put us in a side-room,” Miss Moore interposed, “with the reporters.”

“It’s a mistake, of course,” West remarked. “Mrs. Briggs will be very sorry when she hears about it. Have you been through the rooms?”

Miss Wing shook her head. “We haven’t been anywhere,” she said, plaintively.

The Congressman's Wife

"Then let me take you into the drawing-room. Mrs. Briggs is——"

"She's always near where you are, Mr. West," Miss Wing interrupted, with a malicious smile. "I feel as if I had no right to appropriate you." She glanced affectionately at her companion. "Shall we go, dear, or shall we send him back to our hostess?"

"I think we ought to send him back," Miss Moore replied, taking her cue.

Miss Wing turned to West, her face shining with generosity. "So run along. We'll be generous—for once."

For a moment West looked confused. Then he recovered himself. "I certainly do admire Mrs. Briggs, but that doesn't keep me—" he assumed his most intense look—"from admiring others."

Miss Wing threw back her fine shoulders. "Oh, if you're going to pay *compliments*, we'll certainly keep you. Come along, dear."

III

THE departure of the two women with West gave Mrs. McShane and Farley a chance to work rapidly for several moments. Mrs. McShane, whose years of experience had not developed speed in writing, kept glancing every now and then at Farley in admiration of his skill. He was evidently preparing a general description of the evening, which promised to be remembered, according to Mrs. McShane's report, "as one of the most brilliant events in a Washington Winter remarkable for the brilliancy of its entertainments." The old woman had read that phrase somewhere, and she had already used it several times, each time with a growing fear of detection by her editors. But for such sonorous phrases she would have had some difficulty in continuing her newspaper work. During one of her pauses Farley remarked, pleasantly:

"Inspiration given out, Mrs. McShane?"

The Congressman's Wife

"Oh, if I could only compose like you, Mr. Farley!" she replied, enviously.

Farley laughed. "I guess you'll be all right," he said.

"Sometimes I think I oughtn't ever to have gone into newspaper work," the old woman went on, pathetically. "I don't know enough."

"Oh, you don't have to know anything to do this kind of work," said Farley. Then he felt sorry. He looked up quickly, but Mrs. McShane had apparently noticed nothing in the remark to wound her feelings.

"Perhaps I can help you," Farley went on, in a kindly tone. "I've been trying to do my article in a different way from the usual society article. I should think people would get sick of reading the same old things about the entertainments here. Besides, this party is given more to show off Briggs's house than anything else; so I've been giving up a lot of space to a description of the place itself. It's one of Hanscomb's houses, you know—that big Boston architect, who's been getting such a lot of advertising lately. He's one of the best men in his line we've ever had. He's modeled it on the Colonial style, which is fashionable again. I know a little something about architec-

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ture. I studied it once for six months in New York, before I began newspaper work. So I'm sort of spreading myself. Now, you might do something like that."

"But that wouldn't be fair to you, Mr. Farley," said the old woman.

"No, I don't mean that," Farley went on. "You might make a lot out of the floral decorations and the color scheme in the rooms. People like to hear about those things. Didn't you notice how the library was in Empire——?"

The old woman shook her head. "Oh, I don't understand about these things," she interrupted. "I don't know enough."

Farley laughed again. "Well, I'll tell you. You see, in the first place, Briggs didn't have a professional decorator, as so many people do nowadays. This place doesn't look like a professional decorator's house, does it? Do you know why? Simply because Briggs has a wife whose taste is the very best in the world." Farley's face brightened; his eyes shone. "You know Mrs. Briggs, don't you?"

"Yes; I was sent to interview her once. She wouldn't let me interview her, but she was so nice about it I couldn't help liking her."

The Congressman's Wife

“ Ah, she's fine to everyone!” Farley exclaimed, enthusiastically. “ I never knew anyone to meet her without—” He checked himself suddenly, and his face flushed. “ But we must get down to work. Look here. You've been over the house, haven't you? Well, I'll describe the principal features as quickly as I can, and you can work 'em up.”

“ But how about your own article? ” Mrs. McShane inquired, anxiously.

“ Oh, that'll be all right. I've got it half-done already.”

For several moments Farley talked rapidly and Mrs. McShane took notes. She kept looking up at him in awe of his skill in observation. What a mind he must have, to be able to see so much at a glance! When, at last, she took a moment to offer a compliment, he replied, with a smile:

“ Oh, this isn't the result of my looking the place over to-night,” he said. “ I know Mrs. Briggs a little, and I've talked the house over with her many times. In fact, I've had a hand in it myself.”

As he spoke Farley turned at the sound of a footstep on the stairs. His face brightened, and he started to rise from his seat.

The Congressman's Wife

“ Good-evening, Congressman,” he said.

Douglas Briggs walked quickly down the steps. The exhilaration of the evening made him appear at his best. His gray eye was clear, and his brown hair, and lighter mustache, closely trimmed to his lip, gave him a look of youth.

“ Oh, hello, Farley ! ” he said ; “ what are you doing here ? ” Then he observed the little woman at the table. “ Why, bless my soul ! Mrs. McShane, I’m delighted to see you.” He grasped Mrs. McShane’s hand cordially ; then he turned, smiling at Farley.

“ Great night for you, Congressman,” said the journalist.

Briggs shook his head deprecatingly. “ For Mrs. Briggs, you mean. This is her blow-out.”

Mrs. McShane gathered courage to speak. “ And she’s looking beautiful to-night, sir,” she said in a half-whisper.

Briggs let his hand rest affectionately on the old woman’s arm. “ My dear lady,” he said, in the confidential manner that had won friends for him all through life, “ between you and me, she’s the prettiest woman in Washington. But you mustn’t put that in the paper.”

The Congressman's Wife

Mrs. McShane glowed. "I won't, sir; but it's true, just the same."

Briggs glanced from Mrs. McShane to Farley and again at Mrs. McShane. "What are you two people doing in here, all alone?" he asked, in the tone of the host who catches his guests moping.

"We're trying to get some notes together," Farley explained. "But we're all at sea about the dresses," he added, with a smile.

The music had just ceased, and they heard a rustle of skirts in the next room. Suddenly Fanny Wallace stood among the palms. As she was looking back over her shoulder she did not observe the group in the conservatory.

"Isn't it good to get out of the crowd?" she said, when Guy Fullerton had come up to her. Suddenly she turned and glanced through the palm leaves. "Oh, I didn't know anyone was here!"

"You're just the person we're looking for, my dear," Douglas Briggs exclaimed. "This is Fanny Wallace, my wife's niece, Mrs. McShane. She'll take you through the rooms. She knows all about the pretty frocks. It's all she thinks about."

Fanny looked reproachfully at Briggs. Then

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she darted toward the old woman. "Oh, Mrs. McShane, I want you to see Mrs. Senator Aspinwall's dress before she leaves. It's gorgeous." She turned to the youth, who had dropped into conversation with Farley, and seized him by the coat-sleeve. "Mrs. McShane, this is Mr. Fullerton," she said, impressively, "Mr. Guy Fullerton. He's a very important young man," she went on. "He's my uncle's secretary. Think of that! *You* can come, too, infant, if you like," she concluded, with a change of tone. "You need to learn something about frocks."

The young man laughed good-humoredly and followed Fanny, who had unceremoniously taken Mrs. McShane by the arm. As they were disappearing, Farley called out: "I'll rely on you, Mrs. McShane."

Fanny replied for the old woman. "We'll be in the conservatory in half an hour with yards of description. Oh, this is lovely!" she exclaimed, with a little jump. "I always wanted to be a newspaper woman."

As soon as they were alone Farley walked toward Douglas Briggs. "This is a good chance for me to ask you something, sir," he said.

Briggs smiled. "Have a cigar first, won't you?"

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Oh, I forgot. I promised Mrs. Briggs there should be no smoking here. We might go out on the balcony or up to the smoking-room."

Farley shook his head. "Thanks; no. I won't smoke just now. And I won't detain you more than a minute." He hesitated. "What I'm going to ask seems a little like a violation of hospitality," he remarked, with a look of embarrassment.

"My dear fellow, there's no such thing as a violation of hospitality in the case of a man in public life," said Briggs, pleasantly.

"Well, it's simply this: We want to deny the story about you that's going all over Washington. It hasn't got into the papers yet, but I happen to know that the *New York Chronicle* has it, and is thinking of publishing it."

Briggs looked grave. In repose his face took on years; the lines around the mouth deepened, and the eyes grew tired and dull. "What story?"

"Why, the story that you are in that Trans-continental Railway deal."

"Oh, that!" Briggs threw back his head and laughed, but with a suggestion of bitterness. "Why, to my certain knowledge, they've been saying that about me for the past five years—ever

The Congressman's Wife

since I entered Congress. In fact, there's hardly been a big political steal that I haven't been in."

"But the *Chronicle* people are pretty strong, you know," Farley insisted.

"I don't give a snap of my finger for them."

"Then you won't let me deny the story for you?" There was a ring of disappointment in Farley's voice.

For a moment Briggs did not speak. Then he said, slowly: "Farley, I know you mean all right, and I know you'd like to do me a good turn. You *Gazette* people have been mighty good friends to me. You've stood by me when I had almost no other friends on the independent press; in fact, no friends."

Farley's brow knotted. "But if you'll only let us show there's nothing in the story!"

Briggs shook his head. "No, not one word! I discovered before I'd been in public life three months it was simply a waste of time to deny campaign stories. When a man goes into politics," he concluded, bitterly, "he makes himself the target of all the blackguards in the country."

"But, Congressman," Farley pleaded, "just a word would be enough."

"No. I'm older than you are, and I know

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what I'm talking about. I care so little about this particular story that I made a point of getting Franklin West to come here to-night. He's the man, you know, who's supposed to be at the bottom of that railroad scandal."

"There's not another man in your position who'd dare to take the bull by the horns like that," said Farley, his brow clearing.

"I assure you," Briggs replied, reassuming his confidential manner, "it's the only way of treating the bull."

Farley held out his hand. "I'm glad to have had this little talk with you, Congressman."

Briggs took the hand firmly. "Look in on me at the House to-morrow; I may have something for you."

"Thank you," said Farley, as he ascended the steps.

IV

DOUGLAS BRIGGS stood motionless. His face was hot; he could feel his pulse beating in his temples. Sometimes he wondered if he betrayed the fever that the mere mention of that railroad and the scandals connected with it always caused him. The music had begun again, and he could hear the dancers and the loud talk, broken by laughter. Some of the voices he recognized, among them Fanny's and Guy Fullerton's. His wife's voice he could not hear. He started at the sound of a quick footfall. When he looked up Franklin West's white teeth were gleaming at him from the head of the stairs.

"Oh, here you are!" said West. "I've been trying to get a chance to speak to you all evening." He looked hard at Briggs, and the smile faded. "Anything the matter?"

Briggs drew his arm away and West let his hand drop to his side. "Yes. Farley, of the

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New York *Gazette*—you know him, don't you? I've just been having a talk with him—he says the *Chronicle* is getting ready to jump on me.”

West lifted his brows with a nice imitation of surprise. “About what?”

“About our precious railroad business, of course.”

West looked relieved. “They can't hurt you,” he said, contemptuously.

“I'm not so sure about that. A paper like the *Chronicle* carries weight. It's not like the small fry that have been knifing me lately.”

West turned quickly. This time he betrayed a suggestion of genuine feeling. “But, my dear man, what can they say?”

“They can say what all Washington is saying,” Briggs replied, fiercely. “They can say I've taken money to push that bill through the House. They can queer my re-election.”

West drew out a silver-ornamented cigar-case and offered it to Briggs. “You have a very bald way of expressing yourself sometimes. Have one?”

Briggs lifted his hand in refusal, with a suggestion of disgust and impatience. West deliberated.

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erately lighted his cigar, puffed it, and then looked closely at the burning end. "Taking money," he repeated, as if addressing the cigar—"that's a very disagreeable expression! It isn't," he added, with a laugh, "it isn't professional." He waited as if expecting to receive a reply from Briggs. Then he asked, with a lift of his eyebrows: "Besides, why shouldn't you?"

"Why shouldn't I what?"

"Why shouldn't you take money for the work you've done? You earned it."

Briggs rose from his seat. His face clouded. "Then why should I lie about it every time the subject is mentioned? Why should I try to bamboozle that decent young fellow who was in this room a moment ago? He believes in me. He believes that I'm an honest man, a statesman, a patriot. He believes that I think of nothing, care for nothing, work for nothing, but the welfare of the people who elected me."

West smiled. "He must be an awful ass!" he remarked, quietly.

In spite of his disgust Briggs gave a short laugh. "He—oh, well!" He turned away as if the sight of West had become suddenly obnoxious. "Have you ever believed in anyone in

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your life, West?" he asked, keeping his face averted.

"Oh, yes," West replied. "In you, for example. I believed in you the first time I saw you. I knew you were going to get there."

Briggs looked at him as if examining a curiosity. "That was why you helped me?"

"Certainly," West acknowledged, with a resumption of his large smile.

"You knew that some time I'd be useful to you?"

"You're brutal now, Briggs."

"Perhaps I am."

"One doesn't refer in that way to any service, however slight," West remarked, in the soft voice of conscious politeness.

"True," Briggs replied, bitterly. "But you must admit the payment has been rather hard."

"Most people wouldn't think so. When you came to me, five years ago, you were on the verge of bankruptcy, and you hadn't even begun to make your reputation." West looked at Briggs to observe the effect of his words. Then he continued, with a wave of his hand: "And now see what you are! You've made a big name. You're a power. You have all the swells in Washington at your

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parties. If you had gone under, five years ago, you never could have retrieved yourself. You know that as well as I do."

"And how much satisfaction do you suppose my success has given me?" Briggs exclaimed. "Since I began to prosper here I've not had one really happy moment."

West laughed.

"You don't believe that?"

"Of course I don't. You're blue, that's all. That newspaper man has hurt your feelings. That's your only fault, Briggs—you're too easily hurt. You want to have everybody's good opinion."

"I could get along with my own," Briggs replied, quietly.

"By helping to put that bill through the House you're doing the country a thousand times more good than you've ever accomplished through those reform schemes of yours. You aren't practical enough, Briggs. Solid facts are good enough for me."

"I've observed that," said Briggs, without a change of expression.

"But I'll tell you what you can do," West went on, ignoring his host's manner, "since that con-

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science of yours is bothering you so much. You can vote against the bill. That's what I wanted to speak to you about. It would be a very good move just now."

Briggs looked interested. "How vote against it?" he said, wrinkling his forehead.

"Simply vote," West replied, with a smile and a wave of the hand.

"After all the work I've done for it?" Briggs asked, in astonishment.

"Who's to know about that? If you like you can get up in the House and explain why you've changed your mind."

"*Speak* against it, too?" Briggs could not resist the temptation to lure West on. The revelation of the workings of this man's mind had a fascination for him; they were strangely free from any relation to the principles which he had always believed in, if he had not always practised them.

"Yes. That will turn the tables on the papers that have been attacking you. It will make you seem like a martyr, too. It's worth thousands of votes to you."

Briggs walked slowly across the conservatory. His curiosity had suddenly changed to strong temptation. After all, the scheme was practicable.

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It was merely another expression of the deceit he had been practising for years. In spite of his confidence in his safety, it would be wise for him to take every precaution to protect his reputation. The attacks on his character by the opposition papers would probably grow more violent as the time for his re-election approached. But at the thought of getting up in the House and attacking the bill he had worked for, of making himself an object of contempt to the very men who were his partners in the deal, he turned sick. "No, thank you," he said, suddenly. "I may have done worse things, but I couldn't do that!" For a moment, in spite of the sordid quality of his motive, he had the delicious exhilaration of feeling that he had resisted a temptation.

West shrugged his shoulders. "It's what Aspinwall has done over and over again in the Senate. It doesn't seem to hurt him. He's one of the most popular men in the country—and the biggest fraud," he added, with a laugh.

Briggs had begun to pace the narrow walk of the conservatory. He stopped as if on impulse. "West!" he said.

West looked up in surprise. "Well?"

"I have something to say to you. I'll stand by

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you in this railroad business till it goes through. I'll vote for the bill, because I've pledged myself to it. You can get along without my vote, I know. The bill is sure to pass. But if there's any odium to be attached to me for supporting it, I'll take the consequences."

"Oh! I thought you were a little nervous about your election, that's all," West remarked, carelessly.

The lines running from the corners of Briggs's mouth deepened. "I've lied pretty constantly so far, and I suppose I'll go on lying till the deal goes through."

"That won't be till the next session. We never can bring it up before adjournment."

Briggs apparently did not hear this speech. "But remember one thing," he went on, as if continuing his previous remark, "it's the last official work you need expect me to do for you. Any personal service I shall be only too glad to do. Whatever your motives may have been, you stood by me when I needed a friend. You made my career possible. I should be an ingrate to forget that. But we're quits. In future, I propose to keep my hands free."

West rose from his seat and walked toward

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Briggs. His face betrayed that he was trying to hide a feeling of amusement. These spasms of virtue on the part of Briggs always gave him a pleasant feeling of superiority. "My dear fellow," he said, laying his hand on Briggs's shoulder, "you've been a brick through the whole business. Stand by me till the bill goes through. That's all we expect. Only don't try to be too ideal, you know," he urged, gently. "Ideals are very pretty things, but they won't work in practical politics. If the Government were run by ideals it wouldn't last six months. Legislation's a business, like everything else that brings in money, and the shrewdest men are going to get the biggest returns. Think of all the men we've known who've been sent home from Washington simply because they've been over-zealous! But I must hurry back to the drawing-room. I'm in the clutches of two newspaper women. I only broke away for a moment on a pretext. I'll see you later in the evening."

Briggs watched West disappear. Then he sank on the wicker seat again. This interview was only one of many similar talks he had had with the lobbyist; but each new encounter had the result of heaping fresh humiliation on him. He had

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always disliked West. The first time that he met the fellow he had felt an instinctive mistrust of him. Now the dislike had become so bitter that he could hardly keep from showing it. Sometimes, indeed, he did not try to hide it, and it seemed as if West only pretended that he did not observe it; or as if, indeed, it only amused him. Briggs recalled, with helpless misery, the steps by which he had bound himself to one of those men who used their knowledge of the law to spread corruption in politics. He had come to Washington full of ambition and eager for reform, with an inspiring sense that he had been chosen to be a leader in a great work. Soon he discovered how small an influence he was able to exert. After a few months, however, his personal qualities, his faculty of putting himself on confidential terms with people, made friends for him even in the opposition party. The first time he spoke in the House, his remarks, faltering and vague, had made a poor impression. At that trying moment his ease and eloquence had left him. For several months he was too discouraged to try again. He found it easy, as many another man had done, to drift with the political tide. One day, however, he suddenly lost his self-consciousness in a debate

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on a pension bill in which he had been taking a deep interest. He threw himself into it with vehemence, making two speeches that were reproduced in part by nearly all the big papers in the country. Those speeches gave him a national reputation. The leaders in Congress took an interest in him; their wives discovered that Mrs. Briggs was worth knowing. He felt more pride in his wife's success than in his own. He became dissatisfied with his hotel rooms and took a house that proved to be nearly twice as expensive as he thought it could possibly be. In return for hospitalities he had to give elaborate entertainments. His wife remonstrated; he reassured her, and she trusted him. At the end of the year he owed fifteen thousand dollars.

It was then that he had first met Franklin West. He recalled now with shame his own ingenuous dealings with the lobbyist. In spite of his misgivings, he had accepted the fellow's offer of help; he had placed himself under such obligations that only two courses were open to him, both, as it seemed, dishonorable—to go into bankruptcy and to ruin his future career, or to become West's agent, his tool. At the time, he thought he was making a choice between two evils, and he tried

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to justify himself by the exigencies of the situation and by the plea that his public services more than justified his course. After all, if the Government did not pay its legislators enough to enable them to live as they must live in Washington, it was only fair that the matter should be squared. But it was only in his worst moments that he resorted to this argument.

Like most buoyant natures, Douglas Briggs often had sudden attacks of depression. His talk with Farley, followed by the interview with Franklin West, had taken away all his enthusiasm. Farley, he thought bitterly, had just said that this was a great night for him. Yes, it was a great night. It advertised him before the country as one of the most successful men in Washington and one of the richest men in Congress. What if the papers did ask where he got his money? They were always asking such questions about public men. He need have no fear of them. It was from himself that his punishment must come.

The opening of the new house, this magnificent ball—what real satisfaction could it give him? He could not feel even the elation of victory. He had won no victory. This ball, this house, stood for his defeat, his failure, for the failure that

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meant a life of deceit, of concealment, of covert hypocrisy. Even from the woman he loved beyond the hope of salvation he must hide his real self. He must let her think he was someone else, the man she wished him to be, the man she had tried to make him. Their children, too, would be taught by her, he would teach them himself, to honor him. They would learn the principles by which he must be judged.

V

“WHAT’S the matter, dear?”

Douglas Briggs looked up quickly. “Oh, is that you, Helen?” He smiled into his wife’s face and took her hand. In spite of her matronly figure Helen Briggs did not look her thirty-five years. She had the bright eyes and the fresh coloring of a girl.

“I stole away just for a minute,” she said. “I got so tired of smiling.”

“So did I. Come over here and let me kiss the tired place.” She took a seat beside her husband and turned her cheek toward him, with the amused patience of the married woman who has ceased to be demonstrative. “I know the feeling,” said her husband, with his fingers at the corners of his mouth. “Muscles in here.”

Helen sighed. “Horrid, isn’t it?”

“Well, it’s all part of the game, I suppose. Whew!”

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"What was that for?" she asked, quickly.

Briggs patted her hand. "Nothing, dear, nothing. They say it's a great success."

"I was frightened about the supper; but everything has gone off well."

Briggs looked into his wife's face. "Helen, sometimes I wonder what would become of me if it weren't for you."

"What a foolish thing to say, Douglas!"

"Someone told me to-night that I'd been successful here in Washington because I had such a popular wife. I guess there was a good deal of truth in that."

She drew her hand away and let it rest on her lap. "Nonsense! You've succeeded because you've worked hard, and because you've had the courage of your convictions."

"Oh!" In the dim light she could not see the change of expression in his face.

"And I suppose you've had a little ability, too," she conceded, with a smile.

For a moment they sat in silence.

"Helen!" he said.

"Well?"

"Sometimes I feel as if I hadn't a shred of character left, as if I couldn't stand this political

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life any longer, with its insincerities, its intrigues, its indecencies. Now, these people here to-night—what do they care about us? Nothing. They come here, and they eat and drink and dance, and then they go away and blacken my character.”

She turned quickly, with astonishment in her face. “Why, Douglas!”

“I shouldn’t talk like this, dear, especially at this time, when you have so much on your mind.” He took her hand again and held it tightly. “Helen, do you ever wonder if it’s worth while—all this?”

“This display, do you mean?”

“Yes; this society business. I’m sick of it. Sometimes it makes me—well, it makes me long for those old days in Waverly, when we were so happy together. Even if we were poor we had each other, didn’t we?”

“Yes.”

“And we had our ambitions and our foolish aspirations. They helped to make us happy.”

She drew closer to him. “But they weren’t foolish, Douglas. That is, yours weren’t. And think how you’ve realized all you hoped for already!”

Douglas Briggs drew a long breath. “Yes,

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I've got what I wanted. But the reality is considerably different from what I thought it was going to be. I suppose that's true of nearly every kind of success. We have to pay for it some way. Why, Helen, there are whole days when you and I don't have five minutes together!"

"That's because you have so much to do, dear. I used to mind it at first. But then I saw it couldn't be helped."

"And you've been too good to complain. I've understood that all along."

"I didn't want to stand in the way of your work, Douglas. I could afford to make a few sacrifices, after all you'd done for me."

"Never mind. Just as soon as I can break away from Washington we'll have a good long holiday. If Congress doesn't hang on till Summer, perhaps we can take a little trip abroad. We'll go to Scotland and hunt up those people of yours that your father was always talking about. Then we'll run over to Paris and perhaps see a bit of Switzerland. We'll send the children with Miss Munroe to Waverly and then we'll pretend we're on our honeymoon again. You need the rest and the change as much as I do, dear—more. We'll forget about everything that has

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bothered us since we began to be prosperous. We'll be boy and girl again, Helen. Why, we haven't grown a day older since we were married—in our feelings, I mean—and to me you're just as young and as pretty as you were that afternoon in your father's study when I told you I couldn't get along without you."

She had allowed her head to rest on his shoulder. "Douglas!" she whispered. "Don't be so silly."

He bent forward and kissed her on the forehead. "And do you remember what you said when I told you that?"

"What did I say?" she asked, with a smile.

"You said you'd rather be poor with me than the richest woman in the world without me. You were a very romantic little girl in those days, weren't you? And then I made up my mind to make a great place for you. That's the only real happiness that has come out of my luck here, Helen—seeing you respected and admired by these great people in Washington, the famous men we used to talk about and wonder if we'd ever know." He stopped; then he went on, in a lower voice: "Some of them I know a little too well now. Oh, ho!" he sighed, "I'm afraid I'm

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growing pessimistic. It can't be I'm getting old without realizing it. See these two lines that are coming on my forehead. They grow deeper and deeper with every session of Congress."

"They'll go away when you take your vacation, Douglas," she said, reassuringly.

"And you haven't a line in your face, dear," he said, looking at her with a husband's proprietary pride.

She shook her head. "Oh, yes, around the eyes. They're plain enough when I'm tired."

"No matter, you always look the same to me. I sha'n't ever see 'em," he went on, exultingly. Then he sighed again. "What a fine thing it would be if we could give our poor brains a vacation, if we could only stop thinking for a few weeks! But for some of us the waking up would be—well, it wouldn't be cheerful. Helen, the other night I dreamed that we were back in the little cottage in Waverly, where we lived during the first year of our marriage. I could see the old-fashioned kitchen stove and the queer little furniture, and your father's portrait over the mantel in the parlor. It all seemed so cheerful and restful and happy and innocent. There you were, in that pretty little house dress you used to wear—

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the one I liked, you know, with the little flowers worked in it. We were just two youngsters again, and it seemed good to be there with you all alone. Then I woke up, and a thousand worries began to buzz around my head like an army of mosquitoes, and I had that awful sinking of the heart that you feel after you come back from a pleasant dream and have to face reality again."

"You mustn't think of those things, Douglas."

"Mustn't think of them? Why, they're the things that keep me happy. If I didn't think about those days and expect to live them over again some time, I believe I'd lose courage."

"No, you wouldn't, Douglas. You just imagine that."

He laughed, patting her arm. "My dear practical little wife, what a help you are! Do you know, I feel as if I had always been married. I was thinking of that the other day. I can't think of myself any more as not married. I can't think of myself as apart from you. Have you ever felt that way?"

She looked into his face and smiled.

"Ever since the very first day we became engaged," she said, and he leaned forward and started to clasp her in his arms, when they heard

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a rustle of leaves behind them. Instinctively they drew away from each other. Then they heard Fanny Wallace exclaim:

“ Oh, here they are! ”

Fanny was out of breath, and young Fullerton was waving his handkerchief before his face. They had evidently been dancing desperately.

“ Oh, Auntie,” the girl panted, after a moment, “ the great Mrs. Senator Aspinwall is going, and she’s looking around for you, to say good-night. What in the world are you doing here? ”

“ Mr. Stone is moping in the drawing-room, sir,” said Guy, respectfully. “ He looks as if he wanted to eat somebody’s head off.”

Briggs smiled and passed his hand over his face. “ I don’t believe Stone enjoys parties. He feels more at home at his club. I suppose we ought to go, Helen.” He rose wearily and stretched out his arms. “ What a bore it is! ” he said. “ I suppose we’ll have to stop and speak to some of those people in the ballroom,” he whispered, noticing a group that had just come downstairs.

As soon as they had left the conservatory Fanny turned to her companion. “ Uncle and Auntie are just like lovers, aren’t they? Do you

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suppose you'll be like that when you've been married ten years?"

Guy lost no time in seizing the advantage. "That'll depend a good deal on you," he said, insinuatingly.

Fanny drew back from him and tried to look taller. "What a horrid thing to say! You make me very uncomfortable when you talk like that." But she could not maintain a severe demeanor for more than a moment. "Isn't it beautiful to be allowed to stay up just as late as you please!" she exclaimed, rapturously. "It makes me feel really grown. It's almost as good as wearing long dresses. Just listen to that music, will you?" She struck an attitude, her arms extended. "Want to try?" she asked, holding her hands toward the young fellow.

He fairly dived into her arms, and they swung about together, brushing against the palm leaves and breathing hard. Suddenly she thrust him back from her and continued alone.

"You haven't improved a bit. Oh-h-h!"

From the waltz Fanny broke into a Spanish dance she had learned at school, using her fan with a skill that caused Guy to applaud enthusiastically. "Oh, isn't it great!" she cried. "I

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could dance like this all night. Look out! Don't get in my way and spoil it!" While in the midst of one of her most elaborate effects, she suddenly stopped. A voice had just exclaimed:

"What in the world are you two people doing?"

Fanny turned and confronted a large, smooth-faced, white-haired old gentleman, who was looking down in astonishment from the head of the steps.

"Oh, is that you, dad?" she said, tossing back her hair. "I'm just practising being in society. How d'you like it?" Then she went on, glancing at Guy: "Oh, you haven't met dad, have you? Well, this is *It*, dad—Mr. Fullerton, Mr. Guy Fullerton."

Jonathan Wallace walked deliberately down the steps and offered Guy his hand. "How do you do, sir?" he said, with ponderous gravity.

Before Guy had a chance to speak Fanny broke in: "Mr. Fullerton's the young man I've been writing to you about—the one that's been so attentive this Winter. Here, come and let me fix that tie of yours." She gave her father's tie a deft twist and patted the broad shoulders.

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"There! That's better. Now they'd never know you come from the country."

Wallace turned to Guy. The expression in his flushed face began to soften. "You mustn't mind *her*," he said, quietly. "She's always letting her tongue run away with her. We let her talk to keep her out of worse mischief."

Fanny walked over to Guy, who looked as if he were trying hard to think of something worth saying. "Well, you *have* been paying me attentions, haven't you, Guy?" she said, her voice growing tender as she finished the question. Then she triumphantly exclaimed to her father: "Now!"

Guy was plainly embarrassed. He tried to assume a careless air. "Oh, yes, I've been giving Miss Fanny all my spare time," he replied, entering into the joke.

The face of Jonathan Wallace grew severe again. "You could find better use for your time, I haven't a doubt," he said, without looking at the young fellow. "Well, sis, I'm going home. I've had enough of this rabble. I've rubbed up against politicians enough in the past half-hour to make me hate my country. To hear 'em talk you'd think the country'd been invented to support

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their families. This is the most selfish town I've ever been in. It's every man for himself and nobody for his neighbor."

"There is a lot of wire-pulling going on here, that's true, sir," said Guy.

"Wire-pulling!" Wallace's face expressed a profound scorn. "There was a fellow in the other room mistook me for the Secretary of State, and he buttonholed me for half an hour, talking about the benefit he could confer on the country by being made Minister to Austria. Minister to Austria! I wouldn't give him a job as an errand boy in my factory."

Fanny threw her arms around her father's neck. "Poor old dad! he does have such a hard time whenever he comes to Washington. Don't you, dad?"

She drew her hands away and danced behind Wallace's broad back, jumping on her toes and smiling satirically over his shoulder at young Fullerton, who had assumed his gravest expression.

"Then there's another fellow," Wallace went on, addressing the boy, "who's been trying to work me because I am related to Briggs's wife. I forget what he wanted, now. Some job in New York. If I had to stay in this town ten days at a

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stretch I'd lose my reason. Talk about serving the country! Rifling the country is what those fellows are doing. If I had the power I'd clap the whole gang of 'em in jail."

"Dad, you are very cross to-night," said Fanny, decidedly. "You'd better go home. Think how I feel, having you talk like that before this rising young politician."

"Well, sir, if you intend to make a politician of yourself I'm sorry for you. I'm going, sis."

Fanny seized him by the lapel of his coat and kissed him twice. "All right. Get your beauty sleep," she said, protectingly. "Good-night. And be sure to put on your scarf and turn up the collar of your coat. I'll go down to the hotel and take breakfast with you to-morrow if I wake up in time."

"Better be sensible and stay in bed," Wallace grumbled.

"Good-night," Fanny repeated.

Wallace bowed to Guy. "Good-night, sir," he said, as he turned to go out.

"Isn't he a lovely father?" said Fanny. "Oh, you needn't be afraid of him. I just do this to him," she exclaimed, twirling her little finger—

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"except—oh, I know when to let him alone. Sometimes he's dangerous. Oh, here comes Aunt Helen and that horrid Mr. West. What do you suppose would happen if Mr. West took his smile off? D'you suppose there'd be anything left?"

Helen Briggs looked surprised at seeing the girl. "Your uncle told me you had gone away with Mrs. McShane, Fanny," she said.

"Oh, she found Madame Alphonsine, the dress-maker," Fanny replied. "So I wasn't any use."

West glanced significantly at the young people. "I hope we aren't interrupting a *tête-à-tête*," he said, with exaggerated politeness.

Guy tried to assume a careless air. "Oh, not at all, not at all," he said, grandly. He objected to West's amiable air of patronage.

"Let's go into the ballroom, Guy," Fanny whispered.

Guy hesitated. He looked wistfully at Helen. "Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Briggs?"

Helen shook her head. "Just amuse yourself, that's all."

Fanny seized the boy by the arm and drew him toward the steps.

"Guy's always trying to earn his salary. I

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never knew anyone that worried so much about it."

West took a seat on the wicker divan beside Helen. "He's an exception here in Washington, then, isn't he?" he remarked.

"He's a good, conscientious boy. I sometimes wonder if this Washington life isn't hurting him."

"There's so much wickedness here, do you mean?"

"So much wasting time," Helen replied, seriously.

West drew one of the palm leaves between his fingers. "Don't you think you are—well, just a little too scrupulous about these matters?" he asked, keeping his eyes turned from Helen's face.

Helen laughed. "That's what Douglas is always saying. You aren't going to blame me, too, are you?"

West let the palm spring back from his hand. He tried to look serious. "I should be the last man in the world to blame you for anything, Mrs. Briggs," he said, softly. "I admire you too much as you are."

Helen took her fan from her lap. He could see that her face had flushed. "Aren't we compli-

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mentary to-night!" she said, with a smile. "Do you often say things like that?"

"No. I'm not much of a hand at paying compliments." West leaned back and took a long breath. "Besides, it would be very hard to pay compliments to a woman like you." He leaned forward and allowed both his hands to fall to his knees. "Do you know why?" he went on. "Because you are one of the few women I've met whom I really respect. I pay you the compliment," he laughed, "of telling you nothing but the truth."

"That's the best compliment any woman could be paid, isn't it?" said Helen, fanning herself nervously.

West leaned toward her. "But there are some things I have never quite dared to tell you," he remarked, in a low voice and with a smiling lift of the eyebrows. "I've never dared, because—well, perhaps they would be too interesting. There are some things, you know, that it's very hard for a man to say to a woman, especially to a woman like you."

"They are usually the things that are better left unsaid, aren't they?" Helen remarked, quietly.

"Perhaps." He spoke slowly, as if trying to

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keep his voice steady. "But sometimes it is almost as hard not to say them. It isn't always necessary to put them into words, you know. They say themselves in a thousand ways—in a look, a tone of the voice, in the lightest touch of the hand."

Helen sat suddenly upright. "You are in a very sentimental mood to-night, aren't you, Mr. West? I'm prepared to receive all kinds of confidences." Her assumption of gayety was betrayed by the expression of her eyes.

"I was going to tell you something," West acknowledged. "I think I will tell you. I'm in love. I'm in love with the most fascinating woman in Washington."

"We all know who that is," said Helen, smiling. "But aren't you afraid of the Senator? They say he's a wonderful shot."

West looked injured. "You're laughing at me now, aren't you?"

"It's very hard to take you seriously sometimes, Mr. West."

West apparently did not notice the suggestion of satire in Helen's voice. He did show impatience, however, at the interruption that took place as soon as Helen had spoken.

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“Here she is! Everybody is looking for you, Auntie! Uncle Douglas is out on the terrace with Mr. Stone, and there’s a whole raft of people waiting to say good-night in the drawing-room and in the hall.”

Fanny Wallace made a pretty picture as she stood half-hidden by the foliage. Her faithful attendant waited in the background.

Helen rose and turned to West, who offered his arm. “Shall we go? I’m afraid I’m behaving very badly to-night,” she said.

VI

IN the drawing-room Douglas Briggs found Stone standing disconsolate in a corner. The Boss was plainly out of his element. The politicians who stood near him either had no personal acquaintance with him or belonged to the opposition party. One of these, indeed, the white-haired Senator from Virginia, had recently made a bitter attack on him in a magazine article. It was the first attack that had persuaded Stone to break silence under censure, and the bitterness of his reply showed how deeply he had been hurt. He seemed now to be ostentatiously unconscious of his enemy's presence; but when the host appeared his face assumed a look of intense relief.

"I've been looking all over the place for you," said Briggs, fibbing, as he often did, to cover a momentary embarrassment. The presence of Jim Stone in his house on so conspicuous an occasion, had caused him considerable perturbation.

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He knew, however, that the Boss had come out of personal friendliness and as a mark of special favor.

Stone had no small-talk, and stood in silence waiting for Briggs to make a statement that might lead up to a discussion of their mutual interests.

"Have you seen my wife?" Briggs asked, glancing vaguely about the room, though he knew perfectly well she had gone back to the conservatory with West. A few moments before Helen had mentioned that Stone had shaken hands with her, without, however, entering into conversation.

"Yes, I saw her when I came in," the Boss replied, indifferently. The animated scene in which he found himself evidently annoyed him.

"Suppose we walk out on the balcony," said Briggs, desperately. Stone nodded, and they slowly made their way through the crowd, Stone without speaking and looking straight ahead, and Briggs exchanging a few smiling words with those of his guests whom he could remember by name. At his wife's parties he frequently sustained long conversations with people whom he could not remember to have seen before, but whom he impressed by his interest and friendliness. It was this faculty of being agreeable that

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made enthusiastic young girls say of him: "When he is talking with you, you feel that you're the only person in the world he cares anything about."

His natural keenness and his long experience with men of Stone's type made it plain to Briggs that the Boss had in mind something that he wished to discuss. He decided to give Stone an opening.

"I see by the papers to-night that you're leaving town to-morrow."

"Yes; I shall take the noon train," Stone replied, dropping into a seat where he could look down the wide avenue. The air was warm and heavy, and the electric light fell in soft showers through the foliage of the trees. Hansom cabs and coupés were passing along the asphalt pavement. Around the canopy leading across the sidewalk to the front door the group of unwearied curiosity-seekers watched the departing guests. Stone observed these details as if they had no interest for him. He had the curious eyes of the man who seems to be always looking within.

"I must be getting over to New York myself pretty soon," Briggs remarked, tentatively.

"You'll find some people there who'll be glad to

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see you." For the first time in their talk Stone showed interest. "The boys would like to talk over a few matters with you. They don't like the way things are going lately."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Briggs, quietly.

"They think you're going back on 'em."

For a moment they listened to the clatter of the horses' hoofs in the street. Then Briggs asked: "What has given them that impression?"

"Well, they say you're getting too high and mighty for 'em. You ain't looking out for their interests. They say you've been making altogether too many concessions to the kid-glove fellows." Now that Stone had escaped from the drawing-room he was limbering up, getting back his usual confidence and his air of authority.

"I don't believe I quite know just what they mean by that," Briggs said, with a laugh.

"Oh, I guess you do," Stone went on, easily. "That is, you will," he explained, suddenly realizing that he was a guest talking to his host, "if you take a little time to think it over. I knew what they meant, and I'd been thinking pretty much the same things myself. The only trouble with you, Briggs, is, you're too easy. You don't

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seem to remember that we're not in politics for our health. Those fellows think we ought to do all our work for glory. They've got plenty of money themselves, and they believe we ought to get along without any."

"I suppose there's some truth in that," Briggs acknowledged.

"But don't you let them fool you," Stone went on. "They're in the game for what they can make, just as you and I are. Bah, I know 'em. When they want anything from me they come and fawn and lick my boots, just as the dirtiest of my heelers do. Then, when they find I won't budge, they call me a thief and a scoundrel. I've observed, though, that in spite of being the most abused man in the country I manage to run things pretty much as I choose. Now you take warning by me. I can see plain enough that you are getting farther and farther away from the party. If you don't look out you'll find yourself high and dry. If you lost your grip on the machine, d'you suppose the kid-glove crowd would have any use for you? Not a bit of it."

Briggs kept silence for a moment. In the presence of this man he felt curiously helpless. Whatever might be said against Stone as a public in-

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fluence, there was no doubt that he was a man of force and self-confidence.

"Still," Briggs said at last, "I've got to stand by my convictions, Mr. Stone."

"Oh, keep your convictions! But don't let them make you forget you're here in Washington because your party sent you here. Now, if you do what your party wants you'll be all right. If you pull off your renomination next Fall you'll have to do something for the boys. They won't have any more shilly-shallying. I know that, because I've heard them say so."

Briggs smiled grimly. "Well, sir, I must say I appreciate your frankness."

Now that Stone had delivered his warning, the significance of which he knew Briggs would fully appreciate, his manner softened. "I say these things to you because I like you. You're a credit to the machine. You've done mighty well here for a young man. Only don't forget that it was the machine that made you. That's the point. Well, it's about time for me to be going. You've got a fine place here. By Jove! I envy you myself."

Douglas Briggs did not stir. He was thinking hard. The loss of his renomination in the Au-

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tumn had not occurred to him even as a possibility. He had believed that, with Stone's support, he was firmly established in New York.

"It's very early yet, Mr. Stone," he remarked, absently, following his guest back into the house.

VII

As this evening marked her first "grown-up party," Fanny Wallace had entered with delight into the festivities. She had danced nearly all the dances, most of them with Guy Fullerton, who stood at the door of the ballroom and watched her hungrily while she was waltzing with other men. Now she was exhausted, but, in spite of her aunt's hint, repeated several times, determined not to go to bed. "Let's go where we can be alone," she said to Guy. "Then you can fan me till I get a little breath, and entertain me. I've done so much talking ever since we got acquainted I actually don't know whether you can talk or not."

Guy, who liked her little jokes, even when they were directed against himself, agreed enthusiastically. They passed from room to room, only to find a group of people in each.

"I don't suppose there's any use in trying the

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library," said Fanny at last, with a sigh. "But perhaps no one's there. It's about time people were going home, anyway," she added, tartly.

On entering the library she uttered a cry of delight. "Not a soul!" she exclaimed. "Isn't all this leather furniture nice? I just love green leather. I made Auntie promise that she'd have it. Here, you fix this big chair for me, and bring up that foot-rest. Yes, that's it. Oh, I do wish they wouldn't make furniture so *tall*. There, that's lovely! Now you can sit on that chair—yes, that one, and don't bring it too near, please. That's right." She sank back luxuriously and folded her hands in her lap. "Now you can tell me—let me see, what can you tell me? Oh, talk to me about your life at Harvard. You haven't told me half enough about that."

"Well, there isn't much to tell," said Guy, with a smile, as he stroked his thick, blond hair.

"There isn't? Well, you ought to be ashamed to say so. Did you work *very* hard?"

"Well, not *very*," Guy replied, with an amused glance from his blue eyes.

"What did you do, then?"

"Oh, I did lots of things."

"Such as what?"

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"Well, the best thing I did was to make the first ten of the Pudding."

"What!" Fanny sat bolt upright.

"Yes. I made the first ten of the Pudding," Guy explained, modestly. "Great, wasn't it?"

"What in the world are you talking about? Is it possible you're guying me? Well, I'm ashamed. I didn't think you'd try anything like that on me!"

"Oh!" Guy's face lighted up. "I thought you knew what that meant. Please excuse me. Why, I wouldn't guy you for anything in the world. The Pudding's one of our crack societies, that's all, and the men are elected in batches of ten. It's a great compliment to be on the first ten. I was awfully proud of it."

Fanny looked humbled. "I'm just a country girl, after all," she acknowledged. "And you're the first Harvard man I've ever known. There!" Suddenly she resumed her usual manner. "Now, don't you take me down like that again, Guy Fullerton. If you do I'll— Well, tell me about your old society."

Guy controlled an impulse to rush over and kiss her. He never loved her so much as when she bullied him like that, especially if her bully-

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ing, as often happened, followed a moment of contrition or self-abasement.

"Well, it's all right as a society. The best men in the class belong to it—that is," Guy explained, with a blush, "a lot of the fellows are perfectly fine. Oh, I wish you could have come to my class day!" he broke out. "A lot of us, together in the gym—that is, the——"

"Oh, I guess I know what the *gymnasium* is!" Fanny snapped. "I suppose you had heaps of girls there!"

"Oh, yes; heaps!" Guy continued, innocently. "All the fellows said that we had the prettiest——"

"Stop!"

Guy stopped, astonished.

"I don't want to hear about your pretty girls." Fanny turned her head away, and Guy hesitated. Then she gave him a sidelong glance and one of her most amiable smiles.

"Well, never mind," she conceded. "Tell me about it—girls and all. You didn't really care much for any of 'em, did you?"

Guy met her look with a smile. "Well, I thought I did at the time, but I've changed my mind since."

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Fanny kicked out her feet. "Oh, the poor things!" she exclaimed. "I suppose you made 'em think you'd never forget 'em. Well, anyhow there's *one* girl that's on to you." She clapped her hand to her mouth. "Oh, I'm glad dad didn't hear me say that. He says if I don't stop talking slang he'll cut off my allowance. Well, now go on. Tell me some more about the Pudding. Why, of course, the *Hasty* Pudding. I once went with Aunt Helen to some theatricals they gave in New York. That was three years ago. Did you ever take part in their theatricals?"

Guy fairly beamed. "Did I? I was the *Princess* in 'The Princess and the Dwarf.'"

"A girl's part!" cried Fanny, with a woman's horror at discovering even a remote suggestion of effeminacy in a man she likes.

"Yes; why not? It was great sport."

"But why didn't they let you be a man?"

"Oh, they said I'd do better for a girl," Guy replied, flushing. "You see, with my smooth face I could make up to look like a girl easily enough."

"It must have been kind of fun," Fanny acknowledged. Then she asked: "Did you wear——?—did you?"

The Congressman's Wife

Guy nodded. "It was awful getting 'em on. They made me hold my breath till I thought I'd nearly die. Then two of the fellows fastened 'em. I didn't draw a comfortable breath the whole evening. Gee! It was fierce."

Fanny clapped her hands. "Oh, how I wish I could have seen you!"

"I've got some of the pictures," Guy remarked, tentatively.

"Here?" Fanny exclaimed.

"They're up in my trunk somewhere."

"Oh, you mean thing! You've had 'em all this time and never showed 'em to me! Well, that's just like a man! And you might have known I'd have given anything to see 'em."

"Well, I'll bring 'em down to-morrow," Guy promised.

"And what else did you do in your old club?"

"Oh, we used to have all kinds of sport," Guy replied, feeling the difficulty of explaining to the feminine mind matters exclusively masculine.

"And didn't you do any work at all in college?" Fanny cried, petulantly, with the exaction of serious accomplishment that all women make from men.

The Congressman's Wife

"Ye-e-s," Guy replied. "I used to work pretty hard at examination times. But I wasn't a grind, you know," he added, quickly, as if defending himself from a reproach.

"What's a grind?"

"Why, a fellow that does nothing but study—just grubs. It's awful to be like that!"

Fanny sat upright again.

"Well, I declare!" she said. Then she sighed. "You're the funniest thing!"

"There were some fellows I knew," Guy conceded, "who could do a lot of work and yet go in for all the society things; but they were wonders. I never pretended to be much at study, you know. If I got through my 'exams' by the skin of my teeth I considered myself lucky."

Fanny looked at him thoughtfully. "Well, you're kind of a nice boy, just the same." She cuddled in the corner of the chair and crossed her arms, her hands clasping her shoulders. "I never was much at lessons myself," she admitted. Then she turned quickly toward the door. "'Sh! I see some people coming."

From the hall they heard a woman's voice. "Well, I declare! I feel played out. I've done nothing but bump against people all the evening;

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all kinds of people, too. I never saw so many nationalities in all my life."

"It's Mrs. Burrell," Fanny whispered. "You know her, don't you?—that queer old woman from Maine, with the three daughters. Let's go out."

Mrs. Burrell had entered the room, and started on discovering Guy. Fanny was hidden behind the back of her chair. "Excuse me, if we're intruding," she said to Guy, with effusive politeness and a bow that somehow suggested an intended curtsy.

Fanny lifted her head like a Jack-in-the-box. "Oh, not at all, Mrs. Burrell. How d'you do?"

The old woman started. "How you scared me!"

Three young girls had come into the room, followed by a youth whose deep black and carefully curled mustache at once revealed his race. A shriveled little man with thin white hair and beardless, wrinkled face, enlivened by a pair of keen eyes, walked loosely behind.

Fanny nodded to the girls and rose from her seat. The Frenchman greeted her with an elaborate bow. Guy looked uncomfortable, but Fanny did not try to relieve his embarrassment

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by introducing him. It was Mrs. Burrell who broke the silence.

"Ain't it fine here to-night?" she said. "Well, Washington's a wonderful place! Here's Emeline's been speakin' French to Musseer de Lange on one side, and Gladys has been talking German to—" She looked round at the girls. "Where is he?" she asked.

"I think we have lost 'eem in the crowd," the Frenchman explained, with a look of distress on his face. He had evidently been having a hard time.

"I guess Gladys's German was too much for him," said the tallest and the least pretty of the girls.

"I've asked you not to say things like that, Carrie Cora," said Mrs. Burrell.

The old gentleman, who had been looking with a dazed expression at the book-shelves and at the etchings on the walls, now spoke for the first time, turning, with a smile, to Fanny.

"Carrie Cora an' I are the plain ones of the family," he said. "English is good enough for us."

Mrs. Burrell sank into one of the leather chairs. "Well, it's kind of a relief to get out of

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that crowd. You go over there, Emeline, an' go on talkin' French with musseer."

The look of distress deepened in the face of the Frenchman, who, however, made a place for the girl.

Fanny had edged toward Guy. "Let's get away," she whispered. "We haven't had more than ten minutes alone the whole evening."

Guy's face brightened. "I don't believe there's anyone in the conservatory."

As Fanny started for the door she asked: "Aren't you girls dancing?"

Mrs. Burrell answered for them: "I've been urgin' them, but they won't."

"I don't know how," the eldest girl explained, with a note of resentment in her voice, which her mother at once detected.

"I should think you'd be ashamed to say so, Carrie Cora, after all them lessons last Winter."

"It's too hot in there," said Gladys, who, being the prettiest, evidently considered that she need not try very hard to be amiable.

"Well, good-bye," said Fanny, unceremoniously. "Come on, Guy."

Mrs. Burrell followed the slim figure with an envious look in her eyes. "Ain't she the bright

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little thing?" she remarked, addressing her husband. "I wish our girls was more like her. She'll marry someone 'way up. You see if she don't."

"Oh, I guess our girls can hold their own against anyone, Sarah," Burrell replied.

"Well, I'm sure they've had advantages enough," Mrs. Burrell grumbled. "I don't see why they don't get more attention, though."

Burrell's eyes sparkled with irritation. "Well, they get attention enough when they're to home. That's where they ought to be."

"I just hate to hear you talk like that, father. You don't seem to have no ambition for the children."

"I've brought 'em up respectable, an' I've given 'em enough to eat an' drink, an' I've expected 'em to marry decent fellers in their own station in life. I married a farmer's daughter, an' I ain't had no call to regret it; an' what's good enough for me is good enough for them."

Mrs. Burrell refused to be mollified by the compliment. "Well, times are changed since then, an' I guess I ain't a-goin' to have those girls' education wasted. What did we come here to Washington for, anyway?"

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"Well, that's the very question I've been askin' myself ever since we landed here. What in hell did we come here for? I wish I'd stayed down in Maine, where I belong. I'm somebody down there. But here the' ain't hardly anybody thinks I'm worth speakin' to. There's not a man here that's asked me to have a drink with him to-night."

Mrs. Burrell rose from her seat with quiet dignity. "If you're goin' to begin to talk like that," she said, in a low voice, "I'm goin' home. I declare, these parties are only an aggravation, anyway. Come on, girls." She walked toward the little Frenchman and offered her hand. "Good-night, musseer," she said, with a large smile.

The Frenchman bowed low again. "Good-night, madame." He touched the tips of her fingers with his small, gloved hand.

"I don't believe I like those Frenchmen," whispered Mrs. Burrell, as the family started to leave the room. "You never can tell whether they're laughin' at you or not."

"I guess nearly everybody's beginning to go," said Carrie Cora, briskly. "Let's hurry up, or they'll think we want to be put out. Oh, say, look out there, will you? There's that Mr. West,

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that they say is so attentive to Mrs. Briggs. He's been drinking champagne and punch all the evening. See how red his face is!"

"Hold your tongue, Carrie Cora," said Burrell.

"And talking with Mrs. Briggs, too," cried the youngest daughter. "Here they come. Let's get out of the way. They'll think we're spying on them."

VIII

THE Burrells came face to face with their hostess in the wide hall. "I wondered what had happened to you," said Helen, leaving West, who strolled into the billiard-room, and joining the group. "Have the girls been enjoying themselves?" she asked, turning, with a smile, from the mother to the three daughters.

"Oh, yes, we've all been having a lovely time!" Mrs. Burrell replied, her eyes shining with enthusiasm.

"Oh, yes, lovely!" the girls cried together.

"Of course," Mrs. Burrell went on, with a wistful look, "after my daughters get better acquainted they'll have more partners."

"Ma!" exclaimed Carrie Cora.

"But let me introduce you to some of the gentlemen," said Helen, solicitously. "We'll go back into the drawing-room."

"No," Burrell interposed. "We must go

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home. We ought to have gone long ago. I'm sorry not to have had a chance to talk with your husband about that law case of mine, Mrs. Briggs."

"I'll speak to him about it, Mr. Burrell," said Helen. "Now that Congress is nearly ready to adjourn, he'll have more time. Is it to come before the New York courts?"

The old man nodded. "Those New York men have infringed on my patents, confound 'em! Mrs. Briggs, there ain't anybody else I'd trust as I do your husband. He's been a brick to me ever since I come here. He's the only one of the big fellows in Congress that's taken any notice of me, an' I guess I appreciate it. An' the girls, they think you're just perfect."

"I'm only sorry I couldn't do more for you, Mr. Burrell," said Helen, with a smile.

Mrs. Burrell led the way toward the staircase, the others following, with the exception of Carrie Cora.

"Oh, Mrs. Briggs!" the girl exclaimed, impulsively, "I have something to tell you. But I—I mustn't stay a minute."

"What is it, dear?"

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"He's come to Washington," Carrie Cora whispered. "He got here this morning."

"Why didn't you bring him to-night?"

"I wanted to," Carrie Cora replied, breathlessly. "I wanted him to meet you. I've told him so much about you, and what a help you've been to me. But I was afraid of ma. She was furious when he came to the hotel. He sent his card up, just as bold, and ma didn't want to let me go down to see him. But I did. And oh, he's—he's just as handsome as ever!"

She turned her face away, to hide the tears in her eyes.

"My poor girl," said Helen, taking her hand.

It was at an afternoon tea that the strange girl had confided to Helen Briggs the story of her baffled love-affair. Since that time Helen had often thought of it with a pity none the less real because it had the relief of amusement.

"And he wanted me to go right out, just as I was, and get married. He said he'd call a carriage."

"I'm glad you didn't, dear," said Helen, trying to keep from smiling.

"I think I would have gone—only I just had my every-day dress on, and I looked horrid! It

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seemed so foolish to go like that. And now I'm sorry I didn't. I never shall have the courage again."

"You're sorry?"

"Yes, because ma says that I'm not to see him any more. She made an awful fuss. That's what I wanted to speak to you about. Won't you please talk to ma? He's just as good as he can be, and even if he isn't very successful he earns enough for two. That's all I care about."

"But what can I say to your mother, dear? I don't even know him."

Carrie Cora looked down and began to rub the carpet with her foot. "Well, ma thinks everything of you, and if you'd just—just ask her to let him come to see me, that would be something. I'm sure she'll like him when she understands him better. Pa likes him, but pa is afraid to oppose ma in anything, except when he gets roused."

Helen patted the girl's hand affectionately. "Well, dear, I'll go to see your mother to-morrow. I'll take her out for a drive. Then we can have a good talk together."

Carrie Cora impulsively threw her arms around Helen's neck. "Oh, Mrs. Briggs!" she cried. Then she drew back, ashamed. "It's silly of me

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to act like this, isn't it, before all these people? But I must go now. They'll wonder what has happened to me. Good-night, dear Mrs. Briggs."

During Helen's talk with the girl Franklin West had appeared at the back of the hall with M. de Lange, whom he seemed to know. As soon as the girl disappeared the two men walked toward Helen.

The Frenchman drew his heels together and made another of his low bows, which West observed with the amused superiority of the American, scornful of decorative politeness.

"I have been waiting to say good-night, madame. Your reception, it is most beautiful! The flowers, the pretty women! Ah, you Americans, you are wonderful!"

West interposed coolly: "Well, we do things in pretty good style over here, that's a fact."

M. de Lange looked bewildered. Then his face shone.

"Ah, yes. It is—it is *superbe*. Such beautiful *toilettes*! And your women—they are so many—so——"

West threw back his head. "Yes, we certainly have a great many," he said, with a laugh.

The bewildered look returned to the French-

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man's face. "So many—so beautiful, I mean, so charming. And so many kinds! So different! Your Washington—it is a marvel."

Helen extended her hand.

"You are very good to say so. But I'm sorry you're leaving."

"*Au revoir*, madame." He glanced at West and bowed once more. "Monsieur!"

West looked relieved. "Perhaps now we can have a moment together," he said to Helen. "I have something to say to you. Will you come into the library?"

Helen hesitated. "But only for a moment," she said. When she had entered the room and taken a seat she asked, in a matter-of-fact tone: "What is it?"

"A few moments ago you told me that you weren't able to make me out," West said, slowly.

Helen smiled good-humoredly. "Not quite that, I think. I hadn't tried *very* hard."

"You said you didn't understand what kind of man I really was."

Helen moved uneasily. "I really think I ought to go back. You must tell me these things some other time."

"Wait a minute. I may not have another

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chance to see you alone to-night. There is something I must say to you now."

Helen drew a long breath and turned slightly paler.

"I must tell you what it means to me to be near you."

Helen kept her eyes turned from him. "I don't understand you," she said, quietly.

West let his hand rest on her arm. "You don't understand?"

Helen turned and faced him. "No," she replied, coldly.

"Do you mean that you haven't understood all along how I felt toward you?" For a moment they faced each other in silence.

"Please take your hand off my arm," said Helen.

"Why don't you answer?" West insisted.

Helen drew her arm away.

"Because, as I have told you before, there are some things that are better not said."

"Then you've known?"

"Yes, I've known." Helen did not flinch. "I've suspected."

"Why have you allowed me to come here, then?"

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"Because," Helen replied, slowly, as if measuring her words, "I thought you would never dare to speak to me as you've just done. And if you go on I shall have to call my husband. Before that becomes necessary I must ask you to leave here."

West assumed an attitude of contemptuous indifference. "Thank you, but I prefer to stay."

"You will not go?"

West folded his arms. "No."

Helen turned toward the electric bell.

"Don't touch that bell," said West, authoritatively.

She faced him as if fascinated. He could hear her breathe. "Now, you won't call the servants, and you won't tell your husband anything about this conversation. In the first place, your servants are really my servants."

Helen shrank back. "Oh!" she said.

"They are paid with my money," West went on, with a grim smile. "So I think I may call them mine."

"How contemptible of you!"

West lifted his shoulders. "Well, perhaps I am contemptible. It all depends on the point of view, I suppose. Now, you don't consider your

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husband contemptible, and yet he's worse than I am. I don't pretend to be any better than I am."

"I'll let you say these things to his face," Helen replied, starting to leave the room.

West stood between her and the door. "If you make a scene here, Mrs. Briggs, you'll simply disgrace yourself and you'll ruin your husband. Can't you see what you're doing? Your husband has been in my pay ever since he came to Washington. But for me, do you suppose you could live in all this luxury? Why, this very ball to-night has cost more than half his salary. All those stories that they tell about him are true, do you understand?—only they're not half as bad as the stories I could tell. If the whole truth were known he'd be held up before all the country as a thief and a hypocrite. But for me he'd be a petty country lawyer in the backwoods that you came from. I gave him his chance; I've made him what he is. I've favored him more than anyone else in his position since he came here, for your sake, because I loved you. He knew that, and he's been playing on the knowledge." He released her hands. "I hope you're satisfied now."

Helen sank weakly into a chair.

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"Shall I ring for your husband, Mrs. Briggs?" West asked, with satirical politeness.

Douglas Briggs, who had just learned from Fanny that his wife was in the library, happened to be outside, in the hall. He overheard West's last remark.

"Ring for me!" he repeated, as he entered the room. "What's the matter?"

"Mrs. Briggs is feeling a little faint, I think," said West, with perfect composure. "So I suggested that we send for you."

"Are you ill, Helen?" Briggs asked, anxiously.

"No. It's—it's nothing. If you will take me out on the balcony I shall feel better." Helen passed her hand over her forehead. "It's so close here."

Briggs passed his arm around his wife's waist and walked slowly toward the door. As he left the room he turned. "Make yourself at home, West," he said.

When they reached the balcony Helen let her hand rest on the rail and drew a long breath. "It was so dreadfully hot in there!" she said, with a twinge of conscience at the covert deceit. But she felt she must keep the cause of her agitation



"I don't pretend to be any better than I am."

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from her husband; at any rate, until she had time to think and to decide what to do. If she were to speak now of the insult she had received, she felt sure that nothing would keep Douglas from attacking West and driving him from the house. She must do everything she could to prevent a scandal.

"We'll have to send you back to Waverly, dear, and get some more color into those cheeks of yours." Briggs took his wife's hand. "Why, you're trembling!" he said.

"Oh, it's nothing, dear, nothing. I shall feel perfectly well in a minute." She let him draw her close to him, and they stood together in silence. "We must go back, Douglas. Some of the people must be looking for us. I'm all right now."

"If you feel faint again let me know, or go out of that hot drawing-room," he said. "I'll keep an eye on you, anyway."

IX

It was nearly three o'clock before the last guest left. The flowers in the deserted rooms had drooped and faded; even the lights seemed to have dimmed. The house wore an air of melancholy. Fanny and Guy came from the dining-room, where they had eaten a second supper.

"I wonder where Aunt and Uncle are?" she said. "Doesn't it seem ghostly?" She yawned, covering her cheeks with both hands. "Ugh! I guess they're in the library."

Helen Briggs was seated in one of the big easy-chairs, her head thrown back and her eyes closed. Her husband sat beside her, looking down at her face.

"Flirting, as usual!" said Fanny. Then she added: "Well, wasn't it grand?"

"Better go to bed," said Briggs, sleepily.

Helen half-opened her eyes. "I'm glad you had a good time, dear."

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"Everybody seemed pleased," said Guy, with a glance at Douglas. He liked to look at things from the professional point of view.

"Fanny, do go to bed," Helen insisted.

"All right," Fanny assented, meekly. She kissed Helen; then she kissed her uncle. She approached Guy Fullerton on tiptoe and held her hand high in the air. "Good-night, sir," she said, softly.

A half-hour later the house was in darkness, save for a light in the library, where Douglas Briggs sat writing. After an evening of excitement he never could rest, and he found that some quiet work soothed his nerves. He was one of those men who seemed to thrive with very little rest; he had often worked all night, not even lying down, without showing in his face the next day a trace of the vigil.

Helen had gone to her room, but not to sleep. She changed her ball dress for a loose gown, and letting her hair fall over her shoulders, she sat for a long time thinking. Should she tell Douglas? A disclosure might lead to serious consequences. It would not only break the business relations between Douglas and West, but it would also involve her husband in a bitter personal quar-

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rel. For the present she resolved to keep her secret. As for the charge West had made against Douglas, that was merely another of the calumnies circulated about him since he had begun to be successful in Washington. Why was it that one man could not prosper without exciting the hatred and the envy of so many other men? Douglas, she felt sure, had never done anything to injure anyone. His success had been won by his own abilities and industry. He had worked harder than any other man in Washington. She knew that herself, and she had often heard it remarked by others. She recalled all the unselfish work he had done in Congress, the bills he had toiled for with no purpose beyond that of doing good. Everything he undertook seemed to succeed. Helen had never thought much about the way in which he had made his money. It had come to him along with his successes. She knew that he had lately had good fortune in some land speculations near Washington; but that was perfectly legitimate, and it was merely another evidence of his shrewdness. There were plenty of Congressmen in Washington who remained poor simply because they had not her husband's business resources and enterprise. When finally she

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went to bed, however, she had a vague sense of discomfort that could not be attributed to the agitation caused by her interview with Franklin West. She did not like even the thought of questioning her husband about his ways of making money. She had never doubted him before. Why should she doubt him now?

The next day Helen rose at noon with a splitting headache. She rang the bell, and when the maid appeared, bearing breakfast on a tray, Fanny came, too. Fanny's cheeks were flushed and her eyes were bright.

"What do you suppose I've been doing? I've been taking breakfast down at the hotel with dad. Then I made him go out with me and buy me a lot of things. So I've had a profitable morning. Half a dozen lace handkerchiefs, a silk scarf and a *beautiful* tailor-made coat. It's going to be a dream. I went to the place you like so much—Broadhurst's. I wish you could have heard what they said about my figure. And when I got back everybody was asleep except Uncle Doug. I shouldn't wonder if he sat up all night, though he declared he didn't. Here, I'll fix that tray, Mary. You go down. Let me pour the tea, Auntie. There are two black lines around your

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eyes. They make you look so interesting! I guess you're kind of tired."

"Yes, I am," Helen acknowledged.

"All right, drink this and you'll feel better. Why don't you stay in bed?"

"I mustn't. I promised that I'd take Mrs. Burrell for a drive this afternoon. I told one of the girls."

"More missionary work, I suppose. Auntie, if you don't stop driving round with old frumps like that, I won't recognize you on the street. Well, I guess I'll go for a bicycle ride with Guy. He's been promising to take me out to Chevy Chase for a long time. Don't you think it would be proper?"

"Can't you get someone to go with you?" Helen asked, sipping her tea and wondering why she could not shake off, even for a moment, the thought of Franklin West's remarks the night before.

"I suppose I could get Mrs. Simpson. She's always glad to have someone to ride with her."

"Do that, then," said Helen.

Fanny sighed. "What an awful thing to have to be so proper in this world!"

When Helen had dressed she went up to the

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nursery, where she found Dorothy and Jack eating dinner. They seemed to be always eating. They jumped from their seats and clung around her. They wore their heavy street clothes and their thick boots.

"I was going to take them out before dinner," Miss Munroe explained, "but it seemed damp. So I thought I'd wait till the afternoon."

"Are you going out, mamma?" Jack asked, clutching at Helen's dress.

"Yes, by-and-by," Helen replied, patiently.

Dorothy immediately became plaintive. "Oh, can't we go with you?"

"Not to-day, dear. I'm going to take Mrs. Burrell for a drive."

"Oh, shoot Mrs. Burrell!" Dorothy cried.

"Dorothy!" said Miss Munroe, reproachfully. Miss Munroe often wondered where the children learned their naughty words. They seemed to absorb them from the air. Sometimes she was afraid their parents would think they had learned them from her.

"Papa came up before he went out," said Jack. "He says he's going to buy me a sword."

"Papa is always buying things for Jack!" Dorothy, with a little encouragement, would

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soon have burst into tears. Helen saw that the child was nervous from her morning in the house.

"Take them out as soon as they have finished eating," she said to Miss Munroe.

As Helen descended the stairs she met Fanny and Guy just about to start out on their wheels. "I've telephoned Mrs. Simpson, and she's going. She wants us to lunch with her. You don't mind, do you, dear?" Fanny asked, solicitously, eager to seem important. "If you do, I'll stay."

Helen shook her head. "No, your uncle won't be here, and I'll lunch late. So go and have a good time."

On the table of the library Helen found a pile of New York and Washington morning papers. She glanced at them to see what they had to say about the ball. Some of the New York papers made brief reference to it; one, the most sensational, published a long account. The Washington papers gave it considerable space. Just as she was turning a page of the New York *Chronicle*, Helen caught her husband's name in one of the editorial columns. She turned back and read the paragraph:

"Last night in Washington Congressman

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Douglas Briggs, of New York, gave a ball to celebrate the opening of his new house. It is said that the house alone cost twenty-five thousand dollars. It is furnished in a style that only a rich man could afford. Six years ago Congressman Briggs went to Washington without a dollar, to devote himself to political affairs, practically abandoning his growing law-practice. He has apparently found politics profitable. Funny world!"

Helen read the paragraph rapidly; then she read it more slowly. On finishing, she sat motionless for a few moments. Finally, she placed the paper carefully on the top of the pile. She rose and walked to the window. She heard Miss Munroe come downstairs with the children. She had an impulse to go out into the hall and bid them good-bye, but she checked it; she wished to speak to no one for a few moments.

She went back to the table and read the paragraph again. Then she placed the paper in the centre of the pile. She would not allow herself to think why she did that. She heard a servant pass through the hall, and she called that she would have luncheon served in an hour. During the interval she busied herself feverishly, but she

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could not keep from thinking about that paragraph. Of course, Douglas would see it. Perhaps he had seen it already. She remembered now that Guy usually clipped from the papers all references to her husband. He had left the papers on the table to look them over on his return with Fanny. The clippings he pasted in the big black scrapbooks that Douglas kept on one of the lower shelves, under his law-books. She was tempted to look through these scrapbooks now to see if they contained any references like the one she had just read. But she felt ashamed.

After luncheon Helen drove to The Shoreham, where the Burrells had lived since coming to Washington. Carrie Cora was the first to receive her. "I've had the hardest work keeping ma at home," she said. "I didn't want to let her know I knew you were coming. That would have spoiled everything. It's just lovely of you to come! Gladys and Emeline have gone to the Philharmonic concert, and pa's up to the House."

Mrs. Burrell presently made a vociferous entrance. She was one of those women who do everything noisily. "Well, if this isn't good of you, to come just after that party of yours! I should think you'd be all beat out."

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"I've come to take you for a drive," Helen explained.

Mrs. Burrell slapped her dress with both hands. It was a shimmering brown silk of fashionable cut, that looked somehow as if it did not belong to her.

"I don't believe I'm fit," she said.

"Oh, yes, you are, ma," Carrie Cora urged. "Please go."

"We'll go out into the country somewhere," said Helen.

"So it don't make any difference what you wear," Carrie Cora chimed in.

Mrs. Burrell looked relieved. "I just hate to keep changing. It seems to me we do nothing here in Washington but dress, dress. I get so sick of it! That's the worst of living in these hotels. You never feel at home."

After starting with the old lady, Helen Briggs hesitated to broach the subject of Carrie Cora's love affair. A remark she made soon after they had settled down into conversation unexpectedly relieved her of the necessity.

"I hope Carrie Cora doesn't mind being left alone in the apartment," she said.

"Oh, Lor', no," Mrs. Burrell replied. "I've

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never seen anyone like her. She just loves to be alone. She's always been queer about that, and lately she's been queerer than ever. She don't seem to take an interest in anything. Now, last night, she'd never have gone with us but for you. She hates parties; but she thinks everything of you." Mrs. Burrell drew nearer Helen. "She's in love," she whispered.

Helen smiled. "There isn't any great harm in that."

"There wouldn't be," Mrs. Burrell agreed, "if the young man belonged to her station in life. But he don't. He ain't got a cent to his name."

"I'm sorry to hear that. But isn't there anything else against him?—besides his being poor, I mean."

"Oh, I guess he's *good* enough," Mrs. Burrell acknowledged, grudgingly. "I never heard anything against him. His name is Rufus James," she added, as if this fact in some way explained his condition. "He's here in Washington now." Her lips tightened as she looked at Helen with an expression that said: "Think of that!"

As Helen said nothing, Mrs. Burrell went on: "Of course, he come just because she was here."

"He must be very fond of her," Helen ven-

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tured to remark. "But I don't wonder; Carrie Cora is a very fine girl."

"She *is* a fine girl. I declare to goodness I wish she wouldn't keep her light under a bushel. She does make me so mad! She could have gone to the best teachers down to Boston or anywhere. Father even offered to send her to Europe. She said she'd rather stay at home and do housework. She's a splendid housekeeper. I sometimes think that's what Rufus James wants to marry her for."

"Well, that's a great compliment to Carrie Cora," Helen laughed. "It seems to me a pretty good reason for marrying, too."

"And have her go off and live in some tumble-down place in Auburn!" Mrs. Burrell exclaimed, in horror.

"But perhaps that's the only way she could be happy," Helen insisted, gently. "Carrie Cora's naturally domestic. I can see that."

Mrs. Burrell sighed. "And I always wanted to make something of her! I'm sure her father's spent money enough."

"But if she makes a good wife and mother—that will be enough, won't it? Besides, is Rufus James so very poor?"

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"I don't believe he makes more than a thousand dollars a year."

"That's just what Douglas was earning when we became engaged," said Helen.

"What?" Mrs. Burrell looked startled. "Well, I declare!" she said.

"Douglas was teaching school then at Waverly, where we lived. They paid him only six hundred a year; and he made the rest by writing for the newspapers. At the same time he studied law."

"Well, he *was* smart. I don't wonder he's so successful."

"We had to wait three years before we could marry. That seemed a long time."

Mrs. Burrell sighed. "It must have been hard."

Helen at once pressed the point. "How long has Carrie Cora been waiting?" she asked.

"Oh, they're not *engaged*," Mrs. Burrell replied, reproachfully, as if this fact threw Carrie Cora's case out of the discussion.

"But how long have they been fond of each other?"

"Well, as soon as I found it out I did my best to stop it," said Mrs. Burrell, as if flaunting a

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generous act. "I just told him he wasn't to come to the house any more. That was more'n two years ago."

"So they haven't seen anything of each other since?"

"Oh, yes, they have. Indeed they have. That girl's just as obstinate. She's her father all over. I've said that to my husband a thousand times since this trouble come on us. It's spoiled our Winter here. That girl's a damper on everything. I kind of thought when she come down here she'd get over it. But, as I was saying, she used to meet him 'round places in Auburn, mostly at Emily Farnsworth's. Emily always was a great friend of Carrie Cora's. I used to like Emily real well. Now we don't speak." Mrs. Burrell pressed her lips together again, and tears stood in her eyes.

"Those things are always unfortunate," said Helen, sympathetically.

Mrs. Burrell clutched her by the arm. "There he is now!" she said, "over there. See that slim young man with the derby hat?"

"Who?" Helen asked, mystified.

"Why, Rufus James himself."

The young man saw that he was observed, and

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looked at the two women with surprise in his face. Then his face darkened and he flushed and turned his head quickly away.

"He reco'nized me," Mrs. Burrell exclaimed. "You could see that plain enough. And he never had the politeness to lift his hat."

"Can you blame him?" Helen asked, with a faint smile.

It was Mrs. Burrell who flushed now.

"He's good-looking, isn't he?" Helen went on. She was secretly pleased by the young man's show of spirit.

Mrs. Burrell remained silent for several minutes. Helen waited. "Oh, I know you think I'm as hard as a rock," she blurted out at last. "Just because——"

"Oh, no," Helen interposed, quickly.

Mrs. Burrell grew humble. "Do you think I ought to have let him come?" she asked. "To the house, I mean?"

"It's always a pity when those things have to go on outside the house."

"So Mr. Dyer said. He's our minister. He talked to me just as you've been talking. But I suppose I'm obstinate myself. Still, I've always tried to do right by that girl."

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"I'm sure you have."

They fell into silence again. They had reached the country, and soft breezes blew across their faces, bearing the scent of apple blossoms.

"You ain't said much," Mrs. Burrell began, "but I can just *feel* what you think. You think I ain't done right. Oh, don't! I know just how you feel. You think I've been throwing that girl in temptation's way. But I guess I know Carrie Cora better'n anyone else. And Rufus James is an honorable young man. He's always had a good reputation in Auburn. Oh, dear!"

The tears ran down her withered cheeks. "I'd like to go home," she said to Helen. "I don't feel a bit well. Perhaps my husband will be home. I want to have a talk with him." Helen spoke to the driver and they turned back toward the city. "I'm an awful fool," Mrs. Burrell went on. "And don't you go and blame yourself for anything I've said or done. I've known all along that I wasn't doin' right, but it was just that pride of mine kept me from acknowledgin' it." She dried her eyes and sank back in the seat. Suddenly she sat bolt upright. "D'you suppose Rufus James would come to dinner to-night if I asked him?" she said.

X

HELEN BRIGGS felt uncomfortable on leaving Mrs. Burrell. It was true that she had not introduced the subject of Carrie Cora's love affair, but her conscience troubled her, nevertheless. She did not like interfering in other people's business. However, victory had probably been won for the girl, unless something should change her mother's mind. A resentful word, a disagreeable look on Carrie Cora's part, might shatter the possibility of a lifetime of happiness. On the other hand, Helen argued, Mrs. Burrell might have been justified in opposing her daughter. In spite of her own experience, Helen had grown sceptical with regard to marriage. Many marriages among her friends had begun with every promise of happiness and had been either disappointments or complete failures. So often, she had observed, love seemed to be only an expression of egotism, that soon betrayed itself in selfishness or resentment or bitterness.

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On reaching home Helen found the house deserted save by the servants. On the way she had observed the plain and patient Miss Munroe with the children in the Park. She went into the library to get something to read, and her eye fell on the black scrapbooks. Without realizing that she had for hours been resisting the temptation to examine them, she quickly drew one out from the shelf and placed it on her husband's desk. It happened to be the newest, and it was only half-filled with newspaper clippings. With a nervous impulse she placed it back on the shelf and took the volume at the opposite end of the row. On the fly-leaf she read, in her husband's handwriting: "My first speeches in Congress." Most of these had been clipped from the Congressional reports, and many of them she had read. She turned the pages quickly, stopping here and there to read a personal paragraph of praise or criticism. One paragraph contained this statement:

"It is a satisfaction to see that in Douglas Briggs New York has at last sent a man to Congress who gives promise of taking a conspicuous position before the country. Briggs is impulsive, even hot-headed, and consequently injudicious,

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and his faults would be serious in a man of greater age and experience. But he has decided force of character, invincible determination, remarkable insight into public affairs and an inexhaustible capacity for work. He is sure to cut a great figure if his party stands by him. His danger lies in the chance of his becoming too big a man to be held in check by the party management. He has already overridden several party measures and taken leadership in pushing reforms that are distinctly opposed to the party's policy."

Helen had an impulse to kiss the paper on which these words were printed. But she checked it and turned the leaves more quickly, letting her eye run down each column. For more than an hour she pored over the volumes. When she had glanced over the first three she noticed a change in the tone of the comments. They began to be sarcastic; they pointed out several inconsistencies in her husband's course. One paper published in parallel columns quotations from his speeches, contradicting each other. Then followed open charges of corruption against him in connection with a railroad bill then under consideration in Congress. As she read, Helen grew faint. How

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did it happen that she had neither seen nor heard of this article? Why hadn't Douglas spoken of it to her? Why had he not come out with a public denial, or sued the paper for libel? Then she said to herself that she was foolish to ask these questions. Attacks of this kind were made every day on public men; the higher their position the more bitter the enemies they made.

She heard a sound at the front door, and she started. It was probably Douglas returning early from the House. She was tempted to put the book quickly back in its place; but she sat without moving, waiting for him to come in. He walked up the stairs, however. She rose with a sigh of relief and, closing the book, left it on the table. She made a quiet resolve that she would never tell him of the thoughts that had passed through her mind. She would try never to think of them again. She was ashamed of having thought of them at all.

Douglas Briggs stopped on the upper landing and called, "Helen!" Then he looked down. "Oh, there you are," he said. He descended quickly, and she met him in the hall. "Rested?" he said, taking her hand and pressing it against his cheek.

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"Yes, dear." Then she suddenly put both her hands on his head and kissed him twice. "I'm glad you came back early," she said. "Everybody's out, and I've been feeling lonely."

She returned to the library, and he followed. "I've been looking over your scrapbooks," she said.

"Couldn't you find anything more interesting?" He dropped into a seat near the table and ran his fingers through his hair. "We've been having a great fight to-day. Aspinwall's new tariff schedule. If I'd known I was going to make a speech I'd have asked you to come. Have you seen the notices of our ball last night in the papers?"

Helen nodded.

"The *Star* gave us a great send-off. They treated me as if I were a millionaire." Douglas Briggs sighed. "I wish I were."

"That reminds me, Douglas," said Helen. "I want to ask you something." She was astonished at her own boldness. She felt as if she were speaking at the bidding of someone else. She thought of her resolution, but she felt powerless to keep it.

Briggs looked up. "Well?" Helen did

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not answer at once, and he added: "What is it?"

"Since last night," she began, slowly, seeming to hear her voice in another part of the room, "I've been wondering if we weren't living very extravagantly."

He looked at her in surprise. Then the expression in his face softened. "I shouldn't worry about that, dear, if I were you. There's no need of it."

"Douglas!" she said.

"Eh?" He observed her sharply.

"How much do you make in a year?"

Briggs smiled and frowned at the same moment. "What?" he said, with astonishment, "how much do I make?"

"Yes. What's your income? What was it last year? Please tell me. I have a reason for asking."

Briggs looked vaguely around the room. "'Pon my word, I don't believe I know myself."

"Can't you estimate?"

"I suppose I could," Briggs replied, with a note of irritation in his voice. "But what do you want to know for?"

"I think I ought to know."

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"Don't you have everything you want?" he asked, inconsequently.

"Yes."

"Have I stinted you in anything?"

"No, Douglas, never. You've been perfect. No woman ever had a more generous husband."

Briggs thrust his hands into his pockets and burlesqued an attitude of extreme self-satisfaction. "There! Then there's nothing more to be said, since I'm such a paragon."

"But I want to know, really," Helen insisted. For the first time she had known him she suspected that he was not quite sincere. And yet she could not believe that he was capable of acting with her—with anyone.

Briggs turned quickly. "I told you I didn't know myself."

"But I'm serious about this," Helen went on. "Now, your salary is five thousand, isn't it?"

"M'm—h'm!"

"And the property Aunt Lena left me—how much does that bring in?"

Briggs lifted his shoulders. "Last year it brought in only two thousand. We might have got more out of it——"

"Please don't reproach me about that. You

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know how much I want to keep it safe for the children!"

"Well, if that isn't just like a woman!" Briggs retorted, laughing. "When she might have more for the children!"

"Or nothing at all," Helen remarked, quietly.

Briggs drew his hands from his pockets and sat erect. "Helen," he said, leaning toward his wife, "if you weren't a woman you'd be a parson, like your father and your two younger brothers. It's in your blood."

Helen ignored the remark. "That makes seven thousand, doesn't it?"

"But I never touch *that* money. I add it to the principal."

"So we have only five thousand to live on!" Helen exclaimed, in a startled voice.

Her husband smiled with patient superiority. "No, no! Now you talk as if you were a millionaire's daughter. How much did your father live on, I'd like to know?"

"Eighteen hundred a year."

"Well, I dare say he was just as happy on that as we are on——" He stopped, looking at her with an expression in his eyes that she had never seen there before.

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"On what?" she asked, quietly.

"On what we spend," he replied.

"The ball we gave last night must have cost at least eighteen hundred," Helen persisted.

"Well, I guess we're good for it," Briggs replied, complacently.

Helen lost control of herself. "That's what I can't understand," she cried, excitedly. "How are we good for it?"

Douglas Briggs rose and walked slowly toward his wife. He laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "My dear child, that's not a nice way to speak to your husband!"

"Please don't call me your dear child again, Douglas. Now, I have a reason for asking these questions, and I want you to give me direct answers."

Briggs let his hand drop. Helen rose and walked to the edge of the desk.

"I think you must be ill, dear," he said, looking at her solicitously.

She tried to keep the tears from her voice. "I shall be, unless you tell me the truth."

Douglas Briggs kept his eyes on her for a long time. She turned from him. "Do you mean

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that you want to know whether I am an honest man or not?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I have never questioned your honesty, Douglas."

He hesitated. "I will tell you the truth," he said, as if he had just passed through a struggle. "Last year I must have spent nearly thirty thousand dollars. It was all I had. At the end of the year I was five thousand dollars in debt. That has since been paid."

"How did you make that money?" she asked, facing him.

Briggs looked down at the table. His eyes wandered over his papers and over the black scrapbook. "That's a cruel question for a wife to ask her husband," he remarked at last.

"Not when she knows he will be able to answer it," Helen said, firmly.

"Well, I—I made it mostly through my law practice."

Helen began to breathe quickly. "But I heard you say the other day that since you came to Washington you had been forced to give up your practice."

"So I have—very largely, almost wholly, in fact," he replied, growing impatient again. "But

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there are some interests that I have to look out for here."

"Such as what?"

"Well, there's the—there are some railroad interests."

"Some railroad interests!" Helen repeated, blankly.

"Yes."

"The railroad that Mr. West is concerned in, do you mean?"

"Why, yes. You know that perfectly well. I've been associated with that railroad for years, in one way or another."

"That's the road that receives so much favor from the Government, isn't it?"

"Oh, that's mere gossip. There's no such thing."

Helen looked straight into her husband's face. Her figure had become rigid. "What do you do for the railroad, Douglas?"

His eyes flashed; his nostrils turned white. "You're going too far, Helen," he cried.

She did not stir. "I have a right to ask these questions," she continued, keeping her voice low. "Oh, I know you consider that I can't understand these things. You acknowledge that you receive

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thousands of dollars a year from that railroad—five times as much as your salary.”

“I made no such acknowledgment,” Briggs replied, angrily.

“But it’s true; you know it’s true, Douglas. You can’t deny it.”

“I won’t take the trouble to deny it, since you evidently want to believe it.”

“And you know you don’t give the road an hour a day of your time.”

His lips curled. “My dear girl, lawyers aren’t paid by the hour, like your seamstresses.”

“And the railroad’s regular attorney is Mr. West,” Helen went on. “You know that.”

“Well, West does all the dirty work,” he said, with a laugh.

“And what do you do, Douglas?” She hesitated. “Answer me, Douglas—what do you do?”

“Wait a minute,” he said, in a low voice. He raised his hand. “I warn you that you are interfering with matters that don’t concern you, that you can’t even comprehend. You are doing it at your peril.”

“What do you do for that company?” she repeated.

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He extended both hands in a gesture of deprecation. "I simply look after its interests in the House. There's the truth, now. It's perfectly legitimate. There are plenty of men who do the same thing for other corporations—men in big positions."

Her face grew pale and she swayed forward slightly. Then she stood erect and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Douglas!" she said.

XI

ON the morning after the reception Franklin West sat at his desk in his office in the Belmore Building. His head was bowed over a mass of type-written sheets. He paid little attention to them, however. He found it hard to work this morning. He was thinking, with considerable disgust, that he had made himself ridiculous the night before. He had, moreover, made a misstep that might lead to serious consequences.

Yes, he had certainly been a great ass. He had spoken to Mrs. Briggs in a way he would never have thought of speaking if he had been in his senses. However, now that the mischief was done, he must consider how to meet the consequences. What would the consequences be? Would she tell her husband? The answer to that question depended wholly on whether she believed the charge he had made against her husband's integrity. West knew well enough that Mrs. Briggs

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had an absolute belief in her husband, and this knowledge had often caused him a contemptuous bitterness. Why should a man like Briggs be allowed to deceive such a woman as that? If Mrs. Briggs still kept her faith in her husband, there was no reason why she should not reveal the episode of the previous night—none except the woman's natural fear of creating a scandal. This motive might be strong enough to keep her silent. But, of course, he could never enter her house again. He might, it is true—and the thought gave him a momentary relief—he might write her an apology, and explain his behavior on the plea of his condition. But that would be too humiliating, and it might give Briggs a hold on him that would be decidedly disagreeable, and lead to disastrous consequences. However, this expedient he could try as a final resort. It was, of course, possible that Mrs. Briggs would believe what he had said, or would make an investigation that would bring the truth home to her. Here was an interesting problem. Once convinced that her husband was a hypocrite, that he had made his money by means that she considered dishonest, would she still respect and love him?

West took a satisfaction in thinking that if he

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had made himself ridiculous, he might have at least ruined the happiness of the woman who had repulsed him, and of the man for whom he had a covert hatred, caused partly by jealousy, partly by an instinctive consciousness of Briggs's dislike, and partly by that natural aversion which all men have for those associated with them in dealings that degrade them in their own esteem.

The green door leading into the adjoining room opened, and the office boy entered. "There's a lady to see you, sir," he said.

Franklin West looked up. "Who is she?"

"She told me just to say a lady wanted to see you."

"All right." West rose slowly and left the room. A moment later he was greeting Miss Beatrice Wing.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, with his large smile.

Miss Wing was radiant in a new Spring frock, a tight-fitting blue serge suit, with a large hat, trimmed with blue flowers, resting jauntily on her auburn hair.

"I don't often come out so early," she replied, "especially after such late hours." She looked as if she had had the night's rest of a child.

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"Come into my office, won't you?" West led the way, and Miss Wing followed, suggesting by her walk the steps of a dancer. As she passed the clerks glanced up and smiled covertly at one another. When she had seated herself she looked at West for a moment without speaking, her face bright with good humor.

"I've come on a funny errand," she said at last, rubbing her left arm with her gloved hand.

"That's interesting," said West, cheerfully.

"I want you to do something for me."

The smile disappeared from his face, but swiftly returned. West rarely suffered more than a momentary eclipse. At this moment, however, his instinct warned him of danger. "I shall be only too glad," he began, but Miss Wing cut him short.

"I want," she said, waving one hand with the air of making a joke, "I want to place my services at your feet."

West continued to smile. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I want you to give me something to do. I want you to give me a share in your enterprises. I know I can be useful to you."

"But what about your own work—your newspaper work?"

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Miss Wing snapped her gloved fingers. "What does that amount to? Why, it hardly pays for my frocks. And to tell the truth," she went on, her manner growing more familiar, "I'm not at all clever at it. My editor has to rewrite nearly everything I send him. By nature I'm a business woman. Society reporting bores me. I like larger interests. That's what I came to Washington for."

West showed that he was growing interested by slightly closing his left eye. This gave him a curiously sinister expression, which Miss Wing observed. "You want to do some political work—is that the idea?" he asked.

Miss Wing sank back in her chair. "I want to get a little power if I can, and to use it for my own advantage. Now, there's frankness for you. But I'm only a beginner. I'm just getting my start."

West cleared his throat. "Since you're so frank, Miss Wing," he said, pleasantly, "perhaps you'll tell me just what you have in mind."

On being confronted with this question Miss Wing flushed. "I think you know perfectly well what I mean. I've told you that I want you to let me into your schemes."

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West shrugged his shoulders; his face became almost sad. "I haven't any schemes of that sort," he said, softly.

Miss Wing laughed outright. "You haven't any interest in railroad legislation?" she asked, with a lift of the eyebrows.

"It is true that I'm employed by a railroad. But as you aren't a lawyer, I don't see how you could help me."

Miss Wing looked at him for a long time, her smile hardening. "I'm surprised that you should treat me like this." Then her face softened. "I'm a little hurt, too."

"You wanted me to be frank," West replied, gently.

Miss Wing hesitated. When she spoke it was with a complete change of tone. "There's really no use beating about the bush any longer. Everybody in Washington knows what you do for that railroad. Everybody knows that last year you spent more than a hundred thousand dollars for it—right here in this city. And everybody knows that Congressman Briggs is your tool. He is helping you push the bill through the House. But everybody doesn't know one other fact that I know." She held her head high and looked at

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West defiantly. She flushed, and the flowers in her hat trembled.

"What may that be?" he asked, quietly.

She sank back in her seat and smiled. "If I were to publish an article," she went on, "showing that you had not only bribed Congressman Briggs, but had taken advantage of your hold on him to make love to his wife, that would make a dreadful scandal, wouldn't it?"

West did not stir. He seemed even to control his breath. "I don't know what you are talking about," he said, in a low voice.

Miss Wing smiled and watched him. She admired a man who could take things so coolly. "I've suspected for a long time," she explained, lightly, "and when I saw you drinking all that punch last night, I knew you were losing your head. Wasn't it strong? I just sipped it. That was enough. Oh, you *were* amusing! You entertained me all the evening."

West looked at her without a change of expression. He was thinking how pleasant it would be to take her by the throat and choke out her silvery laugh. "You followed me about, then?" he asked.

Miss Wing looked injured. "Oh, dear, no—

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nothing so vulgar. But I saw it all by the merest chance. I happened to be standing near the library door at just the right angle. I saw you threaten Mrs. Briggs. There was no need of hearing what you said. It was all as plain as daylight. Now, what do you propose to do about it?"

West roused himself. "Do you realize," he said, "that if you were to start a story of that sort no one in Washington would believe you?"

Miss Wing looked hurt. "Then you want me to publish the article?" she said, reproachfully. "How unkind of you!"

"Do as you please about that. It won't be the first libel that has been printed about me."

"Perhaps you would prefer that I should inform Mr. Briggs of what I saw last night," she said. "That would be less public, wouldn't it?"

"Tell him," West replied, with a yawn, "and you'll get turned out of the house for your trouble. Besides, Mrs. Briggs would deny the story. Then where would you be? No, my dear lady, you've made a false start. You'll have to try your game on a younger hand. I've been in Washington too long to be afraid of a woman like you." The smile had completely faded from his face. He looked like a different man, and much older. "Only, if I



"I shall give you a few days to think the matter over."

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were you," he went on, "I wouldn't make the mistake of bothering Congressman Briggs. That might be disastrous to your career here."

Miss Wing rose from her seat. "Thanks for your advice; it's so disinterested," she said, with a bitter smile. "But I shall give you a few days to think the matter over. The article will keep. In case you should wish to write me——"

"I know the address," West interrupted. "Going?" Miss Wing stood at the green door. The toss of her head conveyed anger, resentment and disappointment. "If I were you I'd stick to newspaper work," West called after her. "It pays best in the end."

XII

A WEEK later the mild Spring weather changed to heat that suggested Midsummer. The Potomac flats sent up odors that made people talk about malaria and the importance of getting out of town. Congress gave no sign of adjourning, however. The House was choked with business; important bills were under consideration and equally important bills lay waiting to be brought up. It looked now as if the session might last till July.

The heat, combined with a peremptory order from Ashburnham, had persuaded Fanny Wallace that she must leave for home. She was not altogether sorry to go; since the night of the ball, an atmosphere of gloom seemed to envelop the Briggs household. It affected even Guy, who, however, attributed it to pressure of business. When Fanny complained of it, Guy would close his lips impatiently and say, "Well, Mr. Briggs is up to his neck." At last Fanny ordered him to

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stop using that expression. "You have such a horrid trick of saying the same things over and over again," she cried one day, and when he looked depressed, she tried to apologize by adding:

"I suppose that's because you've got such a limited vocabulary."

"A man don't need to know as many words as a woman," Guy retorted, and he further exasperated Fanny by refusing to explain what he meant.

"I intend mighty quick to go to a place," Fanny exclaimed, "where my conversation will be appreciated. At any rate," she added, "I'll go where people aren't afraid to smile once in a while."

By the time she did leave, however, she and Guy had quarreled and had been reconciled again many times. They parted with the understanding that if Guy could be spared for a week or two, Fanny should go to Ashburnham for a vacation. But on this subject Guy remained conservative to the end. "If Congress holds out all Summer," he said grimly, "I'll have to stay here. I can't leave the Congressmen alone."

"Great company *you* are," Fanny maliciously commented, as Guy stepped off the train. But

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she atoned by smiling at him ravishingly from the car window, and kissing the tips of her fingers.

One hot afternoon, a few days later, as Douglas Briggs was walking slowly home, he met Miss Munroe and her little charges. Dorothy and Jack were walking listlessly, their faces pale, their eyes tired. Even Miss Munroe's face lacked its expression of patient placidity. On meeting him the children showed less than usual enthusiasm.

"They ought to be out of town," said Briggs.

Miss Munroe nodded. "Jack doesn't seem like himself at all," she said, "since this heat began. And Dorothy has lost all her spirits."

That night at dinner Helen sat alone with her husband. Guy Fullerton was dining out. For a long time neither spoke. They were becoming used to silence.

"I've just had a letter from Fanny," Helen said. "She seems very lonely at Ashburnham; but I'm glad she has escaped this dreadful heat."

"That reminds me," Briggs remarked. "I think you'd better not wait till next month before you go up to Waverly. The children will be far better off up there. This heat may continue all through the month. Can't you get away by Saturday?"

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He did not notice that she turned pale.

"I suppose we could," she replied.

"I shall close up the house," he continued, "and take rooms with Guy at the club. If I can manage it I'll go up to Waverly with you for over Sunday. To-morrow I'll send Michael there to open the house and get things ready. His wife had better go with him, too," he added, as an afterthought.

"There'll be no need of going to all that expense," said Helen, flushing. Then she went on, quickly: "Miss Munroe and I can open the house, and we can get Mary Watson's daughter to help us."

"No," said Briggs, decisively. "I want the place to be aired and put in shape before you get there. You're too tired to look after those things, anyway, and Miss Munroe has all she can do to take care of the children."

Helen rose from the table, and her husband followed her out of the room. "I must go right back to the House," he said. "We shall probably have a long session to-night; so I sha'n't be home till late. You needn't have anyone wait up for me."

Their partings after dinner had lately become

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very difficult, involving unnecessary and uncomfortable explanations. Helen had either to attend to some trifling domestic detail or to hurry upstairs to the nursery, and Briggs was absorbed in work that called him to his study or out of the house. They talked a good deal now about matters that did not relate to themselves. Sometimes it was hard to find a topic. They were in that most miserable of human situations where, loving each other, they were able only to cause each other pain. Briggs found relief in his work; Helen devoted more time to the children. She began to wonder if she had not neglected them, if she had not left them too much to their governess. It seemed to her, at times, that they cared as much for Miss Munroe as for herself. Of course, Miss Munroe was in many ways valuable, but she was provincial and narrow-minded and she petted the children too much and gave them sentimental and foolish notions. Helen dreaded seeming ungrateful, but she suspected that the children had outgrown their governess.

With his buoyant nature it was impossible for Douglas Briggs to remain steadily depressed. There were moments when he felt sure that the trouble between his wife and himself would sud-

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denly disappear. Some day, when he returned home, she would meet him in the hall or on the stairs, and by a look, a gesture, would let him know that she had forgiven him. Then he would take her in his arms, and all the anguish of the past few weeks would be over. They would be dearer to each other on account of it, closer, tenderer companions. She was in the right, of course, but she would see that he had been forced to do what he had done; that his sin had not been nearly so great as it seemed to her, and that he was going to pay for it; that he had paid for it already, and he would make ample amends in the future.

Helen Briggs, however, cherished no such illusion. She could see no way out of the difficulty. It was not merely that her respect for her husband had gone; she was bitterly disappointed and hurt. She had decided never to speak to him about Franklin West's insult, but it was her husband's unconscious participation in it that caused her the deepest humiliation and resentment. On the other hand, the very cruelty of her sufferings deepened both her pity for her husband and her love. The thought of leaving him now made her feel faint. She wished to stay with him and to be more to

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him than she had ever been. But in his presence she felt powerless; she could not even seem like herself. She accused herself of being a depressing influence, of adding to his burden.

During the next few days, in spite of the heat that continued to be severe, Helen worked hard helping to close the house and to prepare the children's Summer clothes. Dorothy began to be irritable, and Jack had developed an affection of the throat that frightened her. The doctors told her, however, that the boy would be well again after he had been for a few days in the pure air of Waverly. It was a relief to her to worry about Jack and to care for him, just as it was a satisfaction to go to bed exhausted at the end of each day.

On Friday afternoon Douglas Briggs returned home early. "I sha'n't be here for dinner," he said. "I'm going to a committee meeting at Aspinwall's house, and it'll last till evening, probably. Anyway, he's asked me to stay for a stag dinner. His wife's away, you know."

"Aren't you too busy to go with us to-morrow, Douglas?" Helen asked. "You've not had a minute to yourself this week. Miss Munroe and I can manage very well. If you like you can send Guy down."

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Briggs hesitated. "It is a very hard time for me to leave," he said, nervously stroking his hair. "I ought to be at the House to-morrow morning. But I didn't want you and the children to stay till Monday. It's so hot here——"

"We'll go on, as we planned, and you can stay here," Helen interrupted. She turned away quickly and left him with the feeling that the matter had been taken out of his hands. This turn of affairs displeased him. He decided he would go to Waverly anyway. But when he had returned to the cab waiting at the door he recovered from his resentment. Helen's plan was best, after all. In a week or two there would be a lull, and he could run over to New York and then up the river to Waverly. Perhaps by that time Helen would feel rested and take a different view of things. She had been tired and nervous lately. He liked himself for his leniency toward his wife, and when he reached Aspinwall's house he was in the frame of mind that always enabled him to appear at his best, friendly and frank, but aggressive.

The next morning Briggs drove with his family to the morning train, leaving Guy to reply to his letters. When he bade them good-bye he tried

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to maintain a jocular air. The children clamored after him from the open window, and Dorothy's face gave promise of tears. "Oh, I shall see you all in a few days," he said, as he stood on the platform. "That is, if I hear that Dorothy and Jack are good. I won't come if they are not good."

"Oh, we'll be awful good, papa," said Dorothy, earnestly.

A thick-set young man, with big spectacles, came hurrying to the train, carrying a heavy suitcase. Briggs did not recognize him till he was close at hand.

"Oh, hello, Farley! Going on this train? That's fine. You can look after these people of mine. Helen," Briggs called through the window, "here's Farley. He's going over, too."

"I don't know that I can get a seat in the car," Farley panted.

Briggs turned to the conductor, who stood at the steps. "Oh, I guess Lawton can fix you up," he remarked, pleasantly, displaying his genius for remembering names.

The conductor brightened. "Oh, that'll be all right," he said. "Just jump in," he added, to Farley. "There are two or three vacant places,

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and I'll try to get one of the passengers to change, so that you can sit with the Congressman's family."

Briggs walked forward and stood at the window. "I feel more comfortable now," he said to Farley, with a smile.

The conductor managed to secure the seat beside Helen, and a moment later the train pulled out of the station. Farley had begun to entertain Dorothy and Jack, whom he had seen a few times at home and in the parks. He seemed to know how to approach children; he never talked down to them; he gave them the feeling that they were meeting him on equal terms. His honest eyes and his large, smiling mouth at once won their confidence.

"I'm just running over for Sunday," he explained to Helen. "Awful day to travel, isn't it? But we're going to have a pretty important meeting of our club—the Citizens' Club, you know. We're getting after Rathburn. Know him?"

"He has been at our house to see Mr. Briggs," Helen replied. She remembered Mr. Rathburn as a quiet, and an exceedingly polite man, with a gray, pointed beard, fond of talking about his hobby, the cultivation of roses.

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"I think we've got him where we want him, now," Farley continued. "He's been pretty foxy, but we've caught him napping in that big water-supply steal. He engineered the whole job. It must have cost the city a half-million dollars more than it should have cost. They say he pulled out a hundred thousand for himself. But it's going to queer him for good!"

"Do you mean that you are going to have him prosecuted?" Helen asked.

Farley could not keep from smiling at the simplicity of the question. "Hardly that. That would be more than we could hope for. But if we can only have the thing investigated, and get the people to realize what's been done, why, his political career will be over. There's a whole gang of 'em in with him; but most of 'em have covered their tracks." Farley sighed. "It's strange," he said, "how hard it is to rouse public opinion. Sometimes I believe our people are the most indifferent in the world. They haven't any sense of personal responsibility. That's why we have so many rascals in public life. If I were going in for rascality," he concluded, with a laugh, "I'd become a politician. It's the safest and the most

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profitable way of making money. Big returns and mighty little risk."

Farley apparently did not notice the look of distress in Helen's eyes. Encouraged by her questions, he went on to give her an account of the way in which the club had been founded. "I'd been doing the political work in New York for the *Gazette* for three years," he said; "so that gave me a chance to see things from the inside. And what I did see made me so sick that I thought of quitting the business. But one night I was talking things over with Jimmy Barker. You've heard of him, of course. He made me look at things from another point of view. Jimmy's father left him half a million dollars, and Jimmy, instead of spending it all on himself, is blowing it in on his philanthropic schemes. Lately he's been living down on the East Side and working for a reform in the tenement-house laws. Well, he made me see that, instead of quitting political work, because the society wasn't good enough for me, I ought to stay in it and help to make it a little cleaner, if I could. So he got me to bring together a lot of fellows that looked at things as we did and we formed a sort of organization. At first we had only a few rooms downtown. Now

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we have a house uptown and a pretty big membership. It's all Jimmy's work. He's given us a lot of money, and when we got discouraged he's kept us going by his enthusiasm—and his money, too. I never knew such a man; nothing discourages him." Farley's eyes flashed through his big glasses in the glow of talk. Helen realized for the first time that at moments he was almost handsome.

"Douglas has often spoken to me about the work of your club," she remarked. "He says it is having a great influence in New York."

"I wish we could persuade him to come in with us," Farley said, wistfully. "I've been trying to get him for months. He's just the kind of man we need most. You know we've been careful to keep absolutely non-partisan. We have public men from both parties among our members. It's been pretty hard keeping 'em together. There are a lot of hot-heads among reformers, you know," he went on, smiling. "I suppose when a man gets a strong bias in any direction it's apt to throw him off his equilibrium. But most of our men have seen that partisanship would be the death of us. Our great point is to keep the city government out of politics as much as possible. Of

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course, there's no reason why it shouldn't be, except there seems to be a sort of weakness in human nature for following a banner and going in crowds."

"Then you don't pay attention to politics outside of New York?" Helen asked.

"Only indirectly," Farley replied. "Some time we hope we can have a National organization like our city club to look after some of those rascals down in Washington. But as I was saying," Farley resumed, eagerly, "if I could only get Mr. Briggs to join us, then he'd meet our men, and they'd get to understand him. They don't understand him now. They think he's been an out-and-out machine man. Of course, that's all nonsense. I only wish we had more machine men like him."

Helen turned her head away. Dorothy and Jack were playing games with Miss Munroe. When Jack looked up quickly she noticed a little movement of the head that always reminded her of his father. The first time she had noticed this resemblance it had given her a thrill of happiness.

On the arrival of the train in New York Farley helped his friends into a carriage. "I'm not going to bid you good-bye," he said. "I'll take the ele-

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vated and I'll be at the Grand Central station before you have time to get there."

Helen offered a protest, but Farley smilingly insisted. "It's on my way uptown," he explained. "It won't be the least trouble."

He had charmed Dorothy on the way over from Washington, and for an hour she had lain asleep in his arms. Now she clamored that he be given a place in the carriage.

"I can sit in Mr. Farley's lap," she pleaded.

"No, Dorothy," said Farley, "I'd like that all right; but the carriage is crowded already."

"Then I'll go with Mr. Farley," Dorothy insisted. This compromise, however, was instantly rejected, and the driver whipped off. When Helen reached the station Farley had already secured the tickets and the seats in the parlor car.

"I wish Mr. Farley was going with us," said Jack.

"Oh, do come, please," Dorothy exclaimed, delighted. "Can't you come and live with us like Mr. Fullerton?"

Farley laughed.

"Perhaps Mr. Farley will come some day," said Helen. "Perhaps he will come with papa."

"Oh, good!" Jack shouted.

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"Well, I want Mr. Farley now," Dorothy pouted. The fatigue of the journey had begun to tell on her.

Farley walked down to the car and saw his friends settled in their places. As the train pulled out of the station he stood on the platform and watched till it disappeared. Then he sighed and walked slowly back to the street. How fortunate some men were in this world, he thought. Douglas Briggs was an example. He had everything that could contribute to happiness—success, power, money, a happy home, a wife who must be a perpetual inspiration, and children. Farley cared comparatively little for money or power; he was content to follow his life in the world as it had been laid out for him; but sometimes he grew depressed as he thought that the deeper satisfactions, the love of a wife and of children, he should probably never know. For the past year this feeling had become a conviction. He encouraged no morbid sentiment about it, however. He had plenty of interests and pleasures; his work alone brought rewards that were worth striving for, and in his friendships, his interests and in books he found distraction and solace. He was one of those men who are never tempted to experiment with their

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emotions; so he had kept his mind wholesome, and he had never known the disappointment and the bitterness of those who try to substitute self-indulgence for happiness.

Farley himself hardly realized how much his view of life was influenced by his attitude toward women. He had the exalted view of women that only those men can take who have kept their lives clean. He had first become interested in Douglas Briggs through seeing Briggs's wife. He thought there must be remarkable qualities in a man who could win the love of a woman like that. Until within a few months he had seen Helen only a few times. Now he felt as if he had known her always. He looked back on himself during the years before he first saw her as if he had been someone else, with a feeling very like pity. There were also moments of weakness when he thought with pity of himself as he had been since knowing her.

If Farley had realized the misery he had caused Helen Briggs he would have experienced an agony of regret. On the way to Waverly Helen kept thinking of her talk with him on the train. The revelation of his own character that Farley had given made Helen compare him with her hus-

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band. She had never before appreciated the rare qualities of the journalist, his inflexible honesty, his candor, his generous admirations, his supreme unselfishness. At the thought of his devotion to her husband Helen felt her face flush with shame. Douglas, of course, knew how much Farley admired him; but Douglas was used to admiration; he had received it all his life.

XIII

AFTER Helen's departure, Douglas Briggs felt a curious mingling of relief and depression. It was a relief not to have to face the constant rebuke that the sight of her gave him; and yet it depressed him during the day to think that when he returned home he should not find her there. He realized now many things about himself that he had been unconscious of before. In the happy time that seemed so far away now, during the stress of work, how he had loved to think of her at home there with the children. What a comfort it was just to know they were there and to feel that they were safe. And then, the walk home, with the expectation of finding the children and Helen in the nursery. The glad welcome! Then—but at this point he had to force himself to think of other things. That happiness could never be the same because in her eyes he could never be the same man. She must ever look back on those

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days with a kind of shame; she must feel that he had deceived her, that through it all he had been a hypocrite. With her severe standards she must think that he had never been what she believed him to be. She would judge him by that perfect father of hers, by her sturdy older brother, and by the two brothers who had entered the Church. At other times he would accuse himself of wronging her; she could not judge him so harshly; she could not put aside altogether the love she had once had for him. The love she had once had! He would feel a shock of horror. Why, she must have it still; she had told him a thousand times that nothing could change her love for him. After the children came they used to say that much as they loved the children they loved each other a thousand times more. And how they used to wonder if other husbands and wives loved as they did. They used to laugh and say that perhaps to other people they seemed as commonplace as others did to them. After a time he resolved to discipline himself when these thoughts came; if he were to indulge them, they would make life unbearable. He wondered vaguely if she ever had such thoughts now. Once they used to believe that they often had the same thoughts. In this way, in

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spite of his efforts, he found himself going back to his morbid fancies. Sometimes, on the other hand, he became rebellious and he pitied himself as a man unjustly and inhumanely treated. No woman had a right to treat a man like that, a man who had always tried to be good to her, too. No woman had a right to expect her husband to be perfect.

It seemed curious that at this time Douglas Briggs should have found solace in the companionship of Guy Fullerton. The boy's eager interest in life and his simplicity of mind amused and interested the older man. In spite of his four years of money-spending at Harvard, Guy had not been spoiled; at moments his ingenuousness was almost childish. Douglas Briggs found that with Guy he could discuss matters he would shrink from mentioning in the presence of sophisticated and hardened men. In Guy, too, he saw many of the qualities that he himself had had as a boy, though he recognized that long before reaching his secretary's age he had outgrown most of them. In his dread of being alone he made pretexts for keeping the boy with him in his few hours of leisure during the day. In the late afternoon they would walk from the house to the club

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where Briggs would let Guy order the dinner. They had a table reserved for them in the bay-window of the dining-room, by George, the fat and pompous head-waiter, whose display of teeth at the appearance of Douglas Briggs suggested the memory of a long line of tips. After finishing the meal they would often linger, sipping claret punch which Briggs allowed himself to encourage Guy to drink. He had begun to feel a paternal fondness for Guy; he enjoyed formulating before the young fellow a philosophy of life and offering stray bits of advice. Guy's admiration for him stimulated him and, though he would have hated to acknowledge the fact, it supported him in a good opinion of himself. If in his talks there were matters that occurred to his mind only to be immediately suppressed, the reason was not less because he wished to conceal certain aspects of life from the boy than because he wished to keep the boy's admiration untarnished. Occasionally he wondered if he ought not to do something for Guy, if he were not selfish in his keeping him in a kind of life that might harm him. If the young fellow stayed long enough in Washington he would probably become one of those miserable creatures whose days were spent in hanging on to

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the soiled skirts of the Government. It would be a pity to see Guy, for example, in the army of clerks who, at nine o'clock each day, poured into the Government offices and streamed out again at four in the afternoon. Briggs said to himself that he ought to find a chance for Guy to do work into some sort of independence where he could develop those qualities of faithfulness and intelligence that were plainly his inheritance even if they were somewhat obscured by his boyishness.

After dinner, when there was nothing to call him to the House, Briggs would occasionally be joined by a politician, or by one of the Army or Navy men who frequented the club. He dreaded meeting the officers even more than the politicians. He had grown tired of hearing of the exploits of the Spanish War, of the controversy between rival Admirals and of the rare qualities, on the one hand, of this General or that, and the injustice of the General's advance over officers who had given many years of faithful work to the service. The jealousies and the rivalries among the heroes disgusted him, and the bragging among some of the veterans gave him a contempt for war. At moments he had a horror of meeting anyone except the young fellow who kept him from thinking

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about himself. He wondered if he had grown suddenly old. The talk of the club made him feel as if life had become sordid and mean, as if nothing was ever done from an unselfish motive. In these moods he would sometimes take Guy with him for a ride in the country on a trolley-car to Chevy Chase, where they would sit on the porch of the club and watch the fireflies gleaming over the green sward, or, as oftener happened, to Cabin John's, where they amused themselves by studying the crowd. Cabin John's used to remind Briggs of his early days in the country when he attended the church-picnics. He found himself now going back to those days very often. After all, he reflected, the plain democratic life was the best. And it was this very kind of life that he had been striving so desperately to get away from.

Occasionally during the afternoon Briggs would feel a disgust for work and would go with Guy to the ball-game. Briggs enjoyed a game of baseball for its own sake and because it renewed his old boyish enthusiasm. At college he had been a catcher on his nine and he had never lost his interest in the game. The crowd, too, entertained him with its good nature, its amusing remarks to the players, and with its fitful bursts of rage and

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scorn against the umpire. Briggs used to say to Guy that he believed American men were never so happy as when they were watching a ball-game. "Look at all those fellows," he would remark on the days of the big games. "See how contented they are. And what a harmless pleasure it is, too!" Then, afraid of boring the boy with his philosophy, Briggs would check himself and devote his attention to the game. Meanwhile, however, he continued his reflections. Most of these men were undoubtedly family men; many of them had sent their families for the hot season away to the country or the seashore. He wondered how many of them were really happy. Did they miss their wives and their children as he missed his? Some of them were, of course, glad to be free and Briggs realized the commonplace thought with astonishment. There were some men who did not care for family-life, who were unfitted for it. It had become impossible for him to think of any other kind of life as endurable. Well, it was good that they could all, the happy and unhappy, come to a game of baseball and forget there was such a thing as care in the world.

While he was alone at night, Briggs suffered most. At times he would work late in order to

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exhaust himself; then his brain would become so excited that he could not sleep for hours. Sometimes he rose and tried to read; and occasionally, he would fall asleep in the chair. In his dreams he would wander about the new house, breaking his heart over the sight of places and things associated with his wife. He often said to himself that he felt as if he had lost part of himself; he recalled the remarks he had made to Helen on the night of that wretched party, that he felt as if he had always been married. He wondered what men had to live for who did not have wife and children to think of, to give them incentive for their work. He had always been an optimist and he had felt a curious surprise when he heard people express a dissatisfaction with life. Even his trials and his disappointments had brought with them something stimulating. But now he often sank into despair.

Guy Fullerton was consoled in his confinement in Washington by the sense of his importance to his employer and by the letters that he received from Fanny Wallace. Though an irregular letter-writer, Fanny was voluminous, and she kept Guy amused with her comments on the people that she met and the things that she did. Occasionally

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one of her letters would contain a reference that would throw Guy into temporary depression. Douglas Briggs generally knew when this disaster had occurred, and used to exert himself to rouse the boy, generally with success. At these times Guy would give expression to a philosophy regarding woman so pessimistic and cynical that Briggs with difficulty kept from laughing. In spite of his own troubles, Briggs congratulated himself that he retained his sense of humor. Once he said to Guy, as they were drinking at the club: "My dear boy, you mustn't take life so seriously."

"Well, sir," Guy replied in a deep breath, "I'm just beginning to find out how serious it is."

"It's all right to realize how serious it is," Briggs went on, "but that's different from taking it seriously. Don't let things bother you too much, that's what I mean—little things. Just be sure that everything is coming out all right, and don't mind the details."

Guy shook his head doggedly. "But the details are mighty important, sometimes, Mr. Briggs."

In spite of himself, Briggs sighed. It was much easier to offer philosophy to this boy than to practise it oneself. The silence that followed

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was suddenly broken by Guy's saying: "Do you believe in early marriages, Mr. Briggs?"

The question was received without a smile. "That depends on a good many considerations," Briggs replied, slowly. "And it depends chiefly on the woman. Most people would say that it depended on both the man and the woman. But it's the woman that counts first every time."

"Well, the man counts for something, doesn't he?" Guy urged with a faint smile; but Briggs went on as if he had not been interrupted.

"The man counts only in relation to the woman. If the woman is all right, why, there's no excuse for the man's not being right." Briggs tightly closed his lips. "If he isn't, it shows there's something radically wrong in him. There is no happiness like the happiness of a youthful marriage founded on love and character; but there is no Hell so awful as the unhappiness that comes when a marriage like that strikes disaster."

"Well, it's a lottery, anyway, don't you think so?" Guy asked, made somewhat uncomfortable by Douglas Briggs's intensity, and trying to get back where the water was not too deep for him.

"That's just what it isn't. The results of any marriage could be calculated in advance if we only

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knew how to weigh all the considerations. When a good woman marries an unprincipled man, misery is sure to result for her, possibly for both. When a good woman marries a weak man, well, there's a chance that she'll be able to bolster him up and make a strong character of him."

"That's what I think," Guy cried, so enthusiastically, that Briggs came near smiling again. He was tempted to say, "Don't be so modest, my boy," but he checked himself.

"On general principles," Briggs resumed quietly, "I suppose the great danger of an early marriage is that the wife may outgrow the husband, or, what is far more likely to happen, that the husband will outgrow the wife. I've seen that happen in several cases where the woman has stayed at home and led a limited life, and the man has gone out into the world and developed."

"Still I believe it's possible," Guy went on eagerly, "for the young people to go on together and share everything. Then I don't see—"

"There's where the trouble starts, my boy. The woman may be willing to share everything; but the man is willing mighty seldom. If he's like a good many men, vain and conceited, he'll only

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want to share the good things, the pleasant things; he'll keep the unpleasant to himself."

"Well, that seems to me pretty fine," cried Guy, shaking his head.

"Yes, it sounds so," Briggs went on, "but it doesn't work out right." Then he checked himself, fearing that the boy would read a personal application in what he said. He changed the subject abruptly, as he sometimes did to Guy's bewilderment. At such moments Guy feared that he had unconsciously offended his employer. In spite of the companionship Guy gave the other, there were times when Briggs felt the boy's presence to be somewhat inconvenient. He wished to keep from the young fellow a knowledge of certain business transactions which, as the days passed, grew to be more and more complicated. He often had to keep the door closed against Guy when his broker called. Guy, of course, knew who Balcombe was, the small, keen-eyed, sandy man who frequented the club; but he did not know that Douglas Briggs, whose speculations had previously been conservative, had begun to plunge. Briggs tried to excuse himself for his recklessness on the plea of desperate remedies; he must get rid of Franklin West and, in order to

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maintain his independence, and, to keep afloat, he must at times take risks. Guy used occasionally to notice a curious elation in his employer's manner; it showed itself most conspicuously at the close of the day, when they sat at dinner; it sometimes caused Briggs to tell Guy to order something especially good to eat. But even on the days when he felt depressed, Briggs managed to display an artificial gayety that deceived the boy. Then he would indulge in extravagance for the purpose of cheering himself.

There were moments of solitude, however, when Briggs could not discipline himself into good humor or take comfort from any sophistry. Then he used to wonder grimly what the end would be. Suppose everything went wrong, suppose he should lose the few thousands he had managed to get together to speculate with? Suppose he should find himself out of politics, deep in debt and without resources? These thoughts usually came to him in the middle of the night as he lay in bed, and a cold perspiration would break out on his forehead. In the early morning, too, long before it was time to get up, he would lie half-asleep, suffering from a vague consciousness of profound misery, more terrible than any suf-

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fering he knew in his waking hours. He began to dread the mornings, and he resolved to try to rouse himself and to escape the obsession. But, in spite of his resolutions, he would lie in bed, a helpless prisoner, and as he finally became wide-awake, he would feel exhausted. For himself he believed that he had no fear; his whole solicitude was for Helen and the children. He marvelled that he had never worried about the matter before. He had always felt confident that he could keep his family in comfort. It was true that he had taken out a heavy life-insurance policy; but that was a precaution every sensible family man employed. Already that policy had become a burden; he dreaded the next payment.

In his moments of greatest depression, Douglas Briggs used to accuse himself of having accomplished nothing in his life. Here he was—forty-two! By this time, he ought to have laid a solid foundation for the future. And yet he had advanced no farther than the point he had reached at thirty-six, when first elected to Congress. He had actually gone back. At thirty-six, he had had at least a clear record and good prospects. Now his name was smirched, his self-respect was weakened, and he was committed to a

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course that involved more hypocrisy, if not more dishonesty. In the morning he often woke feeling prematurely old with the horrible sense of being a failure, and with hardly energy enough to take up his cares. He wondered if many men suffered as he did, and he decided that it was probably only the exceptional men who did not; he was probably experiencing the common lot. Here, indeed, was some comfort offered by his philosophy.

One morning Briggs found himself face to face with a definite temptation. There was an easy way out of his difficulties; in fact, there were a dozen easy ways. There were a dozen men within reach who would be glad to take his notes, to extend them, and to hold them indefinitely. In other words, he could realize on them and meet his obligations, and not only clear himself of pressing debt, but reach a position where he need not think of his notes again. He would be obliged to give no pledge, to bind himself by no promises. The chances were that he should not in the future be called on to do anything that would definitely violate his conscience. It was this consideration that caused him to cover his face with his hands and to lean forward despairingly on his desk.

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It recalled to him the situation that had placed him in the power of Franklin West. He rose quickly, feeling the blood rush to his face, and he said aloud: "By God, I won't do it!" Then he seized his hat and walked rapidly out into the street. In the open air he took deep breaths and he had a curious impulse to thrash someone. He was like a man trying to control a wild attack of anger.

Meanwhile, in Waverly, Helen Briggs was suffering as poignantly. The sight of the place where she had first met the young man who was to become her husband and where they had known their first great happiness, added to her misery. The old house, too, brought back the memories of her childhood, of her saintly old father, her gentle mother, whose long years of invalidism had only sweetened her character, her fine older brother, whom she had always regarded as a second father, and the two boys who were now leading happy and useful lives ministering to their churches, one in Rochester and one in Syracuse. Among them all, Douglas had been a sort of hero. To the two young clergymen he represented all that was best in a career of public service. On first coming to Waverly, he had brought a letter of introduction

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to her father and he had quickly been made a family friend. His success in the law and in politics made him a marked man and when Helen's engagement was announced, it seemed as if everything pointed to a happy marriage. And now, after years of happiness, the shock of disappointment had come so suddenly that Helen could hardly realize it. Often at night it seemed to her that she would wake and find the trouble had been only a ghastly dream. In the morning she would go about the house so dispirited that Miss Munroe would ask her if she were not ill. She began to dread Miss Munroe's solicitude; it was terrible to think that someone might discover the secret of her unhappiness. But she knew she could not hide it always. She had a feeling that if her brothers were to find it out, all chance of a reconciliation would be gone. With their stern ideas of rectitude, they could never forgive Douglas. But, after all, she reflected, her own ideas were as stern. Sometimes she wondered if she could be wrong, if her standards were not merely ideal, visionary, the result of her training at home, in the atmosphere of the church, which stood apart from real life. But this thought always terrified her and she turned from it, instinctively feeling that

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if she were to lose her standards she should lose her hold on life itself.

In the old days before their estrangement, Helen had never questioned her husband's movements or had doubts in regard to them. She had trusted him always, as he had trusted her; indeed, the thought of the possibility of suspicion had not entered her mind. Now she wondered why he remained away so long from Waverly. Was it really because he had to be in Washington for business? He had been detained there one Summer before, by private business, but on Friday of each week he had made the long and fatiguing journey home. Could it be that he dreaded meeting her? It was true, she acknowledged, that she dreaded meeting him; but even more she dreaded his not coming. She suffered cruelly from the fear that he would become used to being away from her, that in time he would not miss her. It was only in her more desperate moods that she accused him of not missing her at all now.

It was with regard to the children that Helen Briggs felt most concern for the future, especially with regard to her boy. How could she bring them up so that they should not fall upon disaster as she and Douglas had done? If temptation

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could so overcome Douglas, whom she had always looked on as unconquerable, what could she expect when Jack grew up? Already she had often talked with Douglas of the way they should help Jack to face the trials that boys have to meet. Sometimes Douglas laughed at her solicitude and said that she'd better not try to cross her bridges till she came to them. And she reflected, with a sinking of the heart, even while he was saying that, he knew that his own character had broken down. But she seldom reached this point in her speculations; she received a warning of the violence that would result to her own emotions. Throughout her self-torments, she never let herself believe the situation seemed hopeless. Something would happen, she felt sure, that would finally make everything right. But in her assurances, the mocking spirit of reason ridiculed her hope.

The practical aspects of her trouble were a constant burden on Helen's mind. How could they go on living so extravagantly? Was it not wrong that she should continue to have the luxuries she was used to having? For herself she could easily have gone without them; but she wished to give the children the best that could be bought. They

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were both delicate and they often had to be coaxed to eat, and they refused to eat many of the things that were inexpensive. Helen wondered if she had not pampered them too much. At times she became nearly distracted with the problem of living. She tried to console herself by reflecting that she had two thousand dollars a year of her own and that during the summer the expenses of the house in Waverly were far less than this sum. But such sophistry gave her little help; the truth which she must face was that they were living beyond their means. Someone must suffer from their dishonesty. Surely Douglas must realize that plain fact. Oh, how could he have gone on like that, from month to month, from year to year? And all the while seeming before her the man he had been. That was the worst thought in the whole matter, the thought of his hypocrisy!

After a time, Helen resolved to try to be at peace with herself in regard to the business-affairs of the family until she returned to town. Then she would discuss the whole matter with Douglas. Of course, they must give up their New York house. The thought of returning to it appalled her, but they would probably be obliged to return for a time, until the election had taken

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place, at any rate. Then there was the question of the house in Washington. How could she ever go back to that? It had already become hateful to her. But if she were to return to Washington it would be hard for Douglas to move into a more modest house. At any rate, he would think that the change would injure him. At this juncture she recognized in him a pride which she had never suspected before, a false pride that lowered him in her opinion. Indeed, in all her reasoning she was discovering hidden qualities in him. How could she ever adjust the old Douglas to the new?

When these thoughts came it was a comfort to her to accuse herself of faults and weaknesses. With a relief that seemed like joy she reflected that in his place she too might have yielded to temptation. But instantly she felt a stern denial in her consciousness. Still, if she could not fail just as he had done she might have failed in other ways, possibly worse ways. Once she thought of going to her older brother and telling the whole story, to bring to bear on the situation the light of his common sense. But she could not endure the thought of exposing Douglas like that even to him; it seemed a betrayal of her wifely trust. On the other hand, her brother might help Douglas!

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But she at once thought of the anger Douglas would feel. No, such a step could only aggravate the situation.

In a few days Helen had settled into the monotony of Waverly. The old friends came to see her; the old country gayeties, however, continued without her. She devoted herself chiefly to the children, giving Miss Munroe a holiday of several weeks. She scrupulously wrote to her husband every day, and he answered as regularly. He said that Congress would probably not adjourn till late in July, and as he was desperately driven with work it might be impossible for him to come to Waverly till the session had ended. It was, in fact, not till the first week in August that the session closed. Two days later Helen received a telegram from her husband saying that she might expect him early in the evening; this was soon followed by another message announcing that he had been detained in New York. He came late one afternoon; but he stayed only for the night, returning to New York in the morning. The work in preparation for the Fall campaign had begun unusually early, he said. An enormous amount of work had to be done, and he must stay in town, to be sure it was done right. Helen offered to leave

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the children with Miss Munroe and open the New York house for him, but he refused, insisting that she needed the rest. Besides, he could be perfectly comfortable at the club. For the next few weeks he would have to be in consultation with people day and night. He was so busy that he had been unable to give Guy Fullerton a holiday, or rather, Guy had refused to take one. He often spoke with praise of Guy's devotion.

During the rest of the Summer he ran up to Waverly several times, rarely staying for more than a day. His visits were painful to them both, though they delighted the children. When September came Helen made preparations for her return to New York. She wished to live under the same roof with her husband, though she might seldom see him. At times her absence from him, and the strangeness with which they greeted each other on meeting, terrified her. She would not confess to herself the fear that he would discover she was not indispensable to him; but in spite of the late September heat, it was with great relief that, a week before the nominating convention, she found herself with the children at the house in New York again.

The opening of the New York house began the

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preparations for its closing. These Briggs observed without comment. At times, when, following his wife's point of view, he realized the expense he was carrying, he felt appalled. He wondered how he had ever dared to undertake so much; he felt as if he were just emerging from a debauch of recklessness. What had he been thinking of? What had he expected to happen? He saw now that he had been relying on chance, like a gambler.

During the next few weeks Briggs was so busy with his political work that he practically lived away from home, returning there chiefly to sleep. Whenever he did pass a part of the day at home, he was shut up in the library, working with Guy over his mail, or in seeing callers. He perceived now for the first time how far he had drifted away from the party-moorings. From all sides he received warnings, sometimes covert, occasionally frank and threatening, that a determined opposition was to be made to his renomination. But, the nomination once secured, he felt sure that he could hold his former supporters and gain increased strength from the Independents, whom William Farley was trying to win over. Briggs kept in uninterrupted communication with Farley; he had

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begun to find the journalist extremely companionable. He recalled now with a secret shame that at first he had been suspicious of Farley, attributing an insidious selfishness to his motives; but in every emergency, Farley had shown himself to be open and generous and clean-minded. But it was Farley's perfect confidence that most deeply touched Douglas Briggs. Sometimes Briggs wondered what Helen thought when she saw them working together, with Farley in a subordinate attitude. With her fine sense of character, a sense he had never known to err except with regard to himself, she must long ago have learned to appreciate the journalist's character. Briggs wondered if she suspected that he was trying to use Farley. Once the thought made him boldly accuse himself. But he found a vindication in the thought that he was fighting his way against odds toward an honorable goal. Once elected to Congress, he would do everything in his power to atone for the wrong he had done. His future life would be not merely an expiation, but a vindication. He assured himself that if he were to falter now, he would be a coward. He was committed to his course.

As for Helen, she tried to keep her mind distracted from herself by the cares of the household,

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and she worked during most of the time that she did not spend with the children. Every day she came upon things with happy associations; once the sight of them would have given her pleasure; but now it only hurt her. She was constantly reminded, too, of what she now regarded as her extravagances. Why, they had been living as if they were millionaires! She blamed herself, not because she had spent so freely, but because she had not won her husband's complete confidence. If she had shown more character, she argued, would he not have trusted her in everything? Would he not have kept her informed with regard to his condition? Why had he treated her, a woman and the mother of children, as if she were a child to be petted and to be maintained at any sacrifice in luxury? Sometimes this self-questioning caused her a kind of shame. In her unhappiness she wondered if he had not despised her for accepting so much unquestioningly. She understood now why some men regarded women as monsters of selfishness. Oh, she had been selfish and inconsiderate! Once she thought of going to Douglas and telling him just how she felt. But she had not sufficient courage. Besides, she knew that he would resent her pity for him.

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Then, too, he might think it was far too late for her to take that superior attitude.

Having decided to let Miss Munroe go, Helen dreaded the parting, not because she found the governess necessary, but because of the scene that the children would make. She was tempted to ask the girl to leave without telling the children she was going; but that would be too cruel, as well as underhanded. She feared, too, that the governess would tell the children that she intended to leave them. Miss Munroe had an exalted idea of her own importance, and would wish to make her going as difficult and as dramatic as possible. So when she gave the girl the usual notice, she had to be very careful. To her astonishment, Miss Munroe received it with what seemed like sublime heroism.

"I knew that things weren't going right with you, Mrs. Briggs," she said, "and that I should have to leave soon. I will look for another place. Of course," she went on, her eyes filling with tears, "it will be hard to give up the children."

"I know," Helen said with a sigh, and at the moment she felt pity for the girl, and she wondered if she had not been unjust and foolish. But

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in future, she reflected, the children would be wholly hers.

"It's too bad, isn't it?" Miss Munroe went on with a brave smile, "to be with children long enough to feel almost as if they were your own, and then have to go away from them!"

Helen Briggs felt as if the muscles in her frame had become rigid. In spite of herself, her face hardened. "Please don't tell them you are going," she said, trying not to seem severe, and she thought she detected a look of triumph in the girl's face.

"Very well," said Miss Munroe, tightening her lips.

"I'll write to some people that I know in Washington," Helen resumed, speaking gently, "and see if they may not have a position for you. Their children——"

"Oh, I'd rather not live in Washington again," Miss Munroe interrupted with dignity.

"I thought you liked it," Helen said with surprise.

"Not after what I know about it," Miss Munroe explained, and Helen flushed deeply. Could it be that this girl was covertly trying to wound her? She decided to ignore the suspicion; but it

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made her rise from her seat to indicate that the interview had ended.

Two days later the children ran downstairs to their mother, crying bitterly. It happened that they met the father on the stairs.

"What's the matter?" he asked, and Helen, from her room, noticed the pain in his voice.

"Miss Munroe is going away," they both exclaimed together, and Dorothy added: "She says she's never coming back again."

"An' she says we can't come to see her," Jack cried.

At sight of Helen in the lower hall, they ran past their father down the stairs.

"What does this mean?" Briggs asked angrily over the balusters, and Helen, unable to control the indignation she felt against the governess, replied, "I don't know," and, putting her arms across the shoulders of the children, she led them into the room and closed the door behind her.

Briggs hesitated for a moment, his face white with anger. He was tempted to go down the stairs, force open the door of Helen's room and give vent to his feelings. But he checked himself. Then he had a second impulse, and he dashed up the stairs to the nursery. He found

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Miss Munroe standing in the middle of the room, in tears. She had evidently been listening at the half-open door.

“What have you been saying to those children?” he asked sternly.

Miss Munroe began to sob. “They asked me this morning if it was true that I was going away.” Her head began to move convulsively backward and forward.

“Who told them you were going away?”

“I don’t know, sir. I only know that I didn’t. I promised Mrs. Briggs that I wouldn’t.”

“But you’ve told some of the servants, haven’t you?”

“Well, I—I did mention it to——”

“That’s enough!” Briggs exclaimed. “You ought to have known better.” He hesitated, with a look of despair in his face. “Well, now that they know it, we’ll have no peace with the children till you go.”

Miss Munroe stopped crying. She seemed to grow an inch taller. “I am ready to leave at once, sir,” she said.

“Well!” Briggs knotted his forehead in perplexity. After all, the poor girl had been good to the children. It would be cruel to send her away

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like that. But he quailed at the thought of Dorothy's wailings and questionings and complaints.

"We're going to have a hard time here during the next few weeks," he said in a tone that showed the girl his anger had subsided, "and I simply can't let things be worse than they've got to be. So perhaps the best thing you can do is to take a vacation before you go for good. You can tell the children you are coming back, you know. Oh!" he exclaimed, despairingly, "that won't do at all."

Miss Munroe, with the air of keeping an advantage, stood in silence.

"I knew that Mrs. Briggs would have worried about that—about your telling the children," Briggs went on helplessly.

"She worries about a great many things," Miss Munroe remarked with quiet significance.

"But, for my sake, Miss Munroe," Briggs resumed, plainly without having heard her comment, "if you could take a little vacation soon! That'll be the best for all of us. I know how hard it must be for you, and it will be hard for the children. But, now that the break is to take place, the sooner the better. I'll pay you a month ahead, as I know Mrs. Briggs will do anything she can for you."

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"Oh, I won't have any bother about getting another place," Miss Munroe said cheerfully. "And I'll be glad to do everything that will make things easier for you, sir. I know what a hard time you've been having and, of course, I've been with Mrs. Briggs so much, I understand *her* pretty well."

Briggs stood in silence. He felt as if he had been wounded in some very sensitive place. What did this girl mean? Was she trying to express sympathy for him and at the same time stabbing at Helen? While living with them in the intimacy of the family life, had she been spying on them and gossiping about them with the servants?

"I'll speak to Mrs. Briggs to-day, and she'll let you know when she wants you to leave," he said mechanically, and he walked out of the room.

During the rest of the day Briggs suffered from a dull anger, directed not against the governess, however, but against his wife. If Helen had only not interfered with his affairs, he assured himself, he would have worked out of his troubles. Her interference had upset everything, even the details of the domestic economy. He quickly forgot his resentment against Miss Munroe; after all, it was natural that the poor girl should resent

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being turned away from the family that she had served so faithfully. She had her little pride, too, in not being a mere servant; and that pride had probably been wounded. She was so necessary that he hoped Helen would change her mind about letting her go. He liked the idea of giving the girl a vacation; after missing her services for a few weeks, Helen might be glad to take her back. He meant to speak of the idea to his wife; but in the distraction of his work he forgot it. After a few days, on observing that Miss Munroe still remained in the house, he assumed that she was to stay on indefinitely.

XIV

ON the morning after the convention Douglas Briggs sat in his study, looking over his letters. He heard a tap at the door, and Michael entered with two telegrams.

"If any callers come," said Briggs, "take them into the reception room."

"Yes, sir."

"And give these telegrams to Sam."

Michael nodded gravely; but he did not stir.

"That's all," said Briggs, without looking up.

"It's glad I am, sir, yer got ahead o' them div'ls last night," said Michael.

"Thank you, Michael. We had a hard fight."

"Sure, that was a fine speech yer made, sir."

Briggs raised his head. "I'm glad you heard it." He glanced sharply at Michael. "Were you there?"

"No, sir, but me cousin Ned was, that works for Mr. Barstow over the way. He told me about

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it this mornin', an' I've read it in the mornin' papers."

"I haven't had time to look at the papers yet," Briggs remarked, absently.

"Here they are, sir."

"All right."

Michael kept his position. "Ned said it was fine the way yer drove the lies down their throats, sir."

"Oh, well, I had to get back at 'em somehow," Briggs replied, carelessly.

Michael assumed a more familiar attitude. "Sure, it's a shame the things they say about a man when he's in politics. There was Miles O'Connor, over in the Ninth Ward, one of the foinest men——"

"I guess that'll do, Michael," Briggs interrupted. "Have those telegrams sent as soon as you can."

Michael hurriedly left the room. "Yes, sir," he said at the door.

Briggs passed one hand over his forehead. "God!" he muttered. "I have to keep up this bluff even before my servants." Just as he resumed work he heard Michael's tap again. "Come in," he cried, impatiently.

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"Here's something that just come by messenger, sir," said Michael.

"Put it on the table, and don't interrupt me again till I ring. Keep any other letters and telegrams till Mr. Fullerton comes down."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, sir," said Michael. "Mr. West called you up on the telephone a little while ago."

Briggs looked surprised. "Mr. Franklin West?" he asked, with a frown.

"Yes, sir."

"From Washington, do you mean? Why didn't you let me know?"

"No, sir, not from Washington. He's here in town, sir. He told me not to wake you up."

"Where is he?" Briggs asked.

"He's stoppin' at a hotel, sir."

Briggs hesitated. "At a hotel?" he repeated. "What did he go to a hotel for? He always stays here when he comes to town."

"He come over last night on the midnight train, sir. Here's the telephone number. He said perhaps ye'd be kind enough to call him up this mornin' and let him know when it would be most convenient for yer to see him."

"Strange," Briggs remarked, thoughtfully.

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Then he turned to Michael. "Did he say that anyone was with him?"

Michael shook his head. "He only said he'd wait at the hotel till he heard from yer, sir."

Briggs stood for a moment thinking. Then he said, with two fingers on his lips: "You tell Sam to drive down right off and bring Mr. West up here. Tell him to bring Mr. West's luggage, too, and ask him to say to Mr. West that there's a room all ready for him, as usual. This is a funny time for him to stand on ceremony with me."

Michael started to go out; then turned back. "I suppose yer didn't know Miss Fanny came last night, sir."

"I thought she wasn't coming till next week."

"She arrived last night, sir, at nine o'clock. She sat up for yer, sir, till she fell asleep in the chair, and Mrs. Briggs made her go to bed."

"Good girl," said Briggs. "I suppose she hasn't come down yet."

"No, sir."

A half-hour later Briggs heard the rustle of skirts outside the study door. Then the door opened softly. He went on busily writing. Light steps crossed to the chair behind him.

"Ahem!"

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"Oh, hello, Fanny!" he said, without looking up.

"How did you know it was me?" cried Fanny, in a tone of disappointment.

Briggs leaned back in his chair and received an impulsive kiss on the cheek. "Well, I don't know anyone else who'd steal in just like that."

"Michael told you, didn't he?"

"Perhaps."

"He didn't want to let me come in." Fanny sat on the edge of the desk. "He said you were busy. You—*busy!*"

Douglas Briggs smiled. "Well, I don't seem to be busy whenever you're around, do I? Still, I have to do a little work now and then."

"I think there's too much work in the world," Fanny pouted. "Now there's poor Guy. Think how he works!"

"Guy! Why, at this minute he's sound asleep, and it's nearly ten o'clock."

"But think how he worked at that old nomination meeting of yours! He didn't get home till nearly morning."

"Well, I didn't, either."

"But you're tough, Uncle Doug; Guy is delicate."

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"They generally are, at his age," Briggs acknowledged, dryly, "especially when they have just come out of college."

"I think you're horrid to say such things about Guy, when he helps you so, too. I've just been up to see him."

Briggs sat back in his chair. "W-h-hat!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, you needn't be shocked! I just *peeked* in. He was sound asleep, with his head resting on one hand, just like this, and the sweetest little blush on his face, and his hair in the cunningest little bang on his forehead. I was so relieved about one thing."

"What's that?"

Fanny looked stealthily around the room. "He doesn't snore!" she said, with her hand over her mouth.

"Oh! But suppose he had snored?"

Fanny slid from the desk and drew herself up. "Then, of course, I should have been obliged to—well, to break the——"

"Do you mean to say there's an engagement between you two?"

Fanny held her hand over her uncle's lips. "'Sh! No, not that. What would dad say if he

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heard you? Only he's been writing me the loveliest letters this Summer. M'm!"

"I shall have to congratulate Guy on not snoring. But suppose," Briggs continued, confidentially, "suppose I should tell you that sometimes he did snore?"

Fanny tossed back her head. "Well, that wouldn't make any difference, either. Come to think of it, if Guy had snored this morning, his snoring would have been nice. Funny about love, isn't it, Uncle Doug?" Fanny added, pensively.

"What is?"

"It makes everything nice."

"In the one you love, you mean?"

Fanny nodded. "M'm—h'm!"

"Then you're really in love with Guy?"

Fanny danced away. "Oh, I didn't say that."

"Fanny," said Briggs, gently.

Fanny edged toward the table. "Well?" She still kept out of reach.

"Come over here," Briggs urged.

Fanny stood at her uncle's side, with one hand on the desk; Briggs let his hand rest on hers. "If you and Guy are really in love with each other, I have a bit of advice to give you."

"Oh, you're going to tell me how foolish it is

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to get married, aren't you? That's the way married people always talk."

Briggs smiled and shook his head. "No, I don't mean that."

"Well? Wait till Guy gets rich, I suppose." Fanny sighed. "Then I know I shall die an old maid!"

"No, I don't mean that, either."

"What do you mean, then?" Fanny said, severely.

"Make him give up the foolish notion he has of going into politics."

"Oh, Uncle Doug!" Fanny exclaimed, reproachfully.

"Guy is a good, clean-hearted young fellow. You don't want him to become cynical and hypocritical and deceitful, do you? You don't want him to believe there's no such thing as unselfishness in the world, that whenever a man turns his hand he expects to be paid for it ten times over?"

Fanny looked with astonishment at her uncle. "Well, what in the world is the matter with you?" she said, after a moment.

Briggs patted her hand. "There, there! I won't preach any more. But I mean what I say."

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When Fanny spoke again there were tears in her voice. "Isn't he a good secretary?"

"Oh, yes, good enough."

"You're mad because he's staying in bed so late."

"Nonsense! I told Michael myself not to call him. He's worked himself to death during the past few weeks. I had to fight for my renomination, you know."

"You did?" said Fanny, with a change of tone. "Why, I thought you were the most popular man in New York."

"Well, the most popular men have enemies," Briggs replied, grimly.

Fanny suddenly became affectionate, almost pathetic. "And I never congratulated you! I was so sure you'd be nominated—why, I took it as a matter of course."

Briggs looked away. "Yes, you women folks always do," he said, bitterly. "It is only the disappointments in life that you don't take as matters of course."

Fanny clapped her hands. "Uncle Doug, now I know what the trouble is. You haven't had any breakfast. Dad's always as cross as two sticks till he's had his."

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"Yes, I have. I'm tired, that's all. Now, run along, like a good girl. I've got a lot of work to do."

"Oh!" Fanny tossed her head, rose lightly on tiptoe and, swaying back and forth, started for the door. There she turned. "You forget I've had a birthday since I saw you last," she said, haughtily.

Douglas Briggs had begun to write again. "Did you? What was it—fourteen, fifteen—?"

Fanny stiffened her fingers and held them before her eyes. "Ugh!" she exclaimed.

As she started to open the door she was thrust rudely back. Someone had pushed the door from the other side. She turned quickly and met the astonished face of Guy Fullerton.

"Fanny!" Guy cried, joyously. "When in the world did you get here?"

Fanny held out both hands. Guy seized them and tried to draw her toward him. She stopped him with a warning gesture, and glanced at her uncle.

"Go ahead," said Douglas Briggs. "I'm not looking."

Guy and Fanny embraced silently.

Fanny glanced at the shoulders bent over the table. "Thank you, sir," she said, meekly.

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"Why didn't you let me know you were coming?" Guy cried, reproachfully.

"Because I thought I'd give you a surprise, sleepy-head."

Briggs turned on his swivel-chair. "I guess you two'd better go into the other room."

"Can't I do anything for you, sir?" Guy asked. "The correspondence?"

"No hurry about that. I'll ring when I need you. Oh, Fanny, you might ask your aunt to look in here a moment. I want to speak to her."

"All right." Fanny danced radiantly out of the room, followed by Guy. A moment later Briggs heard her call up the stairs: "Oh, auntie, Uncle Doug wants you."

He listened and heard his wife descending. The sound of her footsteps gave him a strange feeling of mingled pleasure and discomfort. He had begun to resent her treatment of him. "Good-morning," he said, cheerfully, as she entered. He rose quickly and offered her a chair.

"Did you wish to see me?" Helen asked, still standing.

"Yes. There were one or two things I wanted to talk over. Won't you sit down?"

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Helen took the seat. "Thank you," she said. They had become very ceremonious.

"How are the children this morning?"

"I've just left them in the nursery. They are perfectly well."

"Hasn't Miss Munroe taken them out yet?"

Helen met his look. "Miss Munroe is leaving to-day," she replied.

"What?" he cried, astonished.

"I told you several weeks ago that she was going to leave."

"But I didn't think you'd—" Briggs turned away and rested his head on his hand, with his elbow on the table. "Will you be kind enough to tell me why you have sent Miss Munroe away?" he asked, in a tone that showed he was trying to control himself. "She's been with the children ever since they were born. You can't get anyone to fill her place."

"I sent her away because we couldn't afford to keep her," Helen replied.

"What do you mean by *we*?"

"Because *I* couldn't afford to keep her, then."

"And you think that I don't count at all!" He laughed bitterly. "Those children are as much my children as yours, and I propose to have some-

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thing to say about the way they are taken care of." He glanced angrily at Helen, who remained silent. "You can be pretty exasperating at times, Helen. What do you propose to do with the children when we go back to Washington?"

"I am not going back to Washington," she replied, in a low voice.

"What?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"I am not going back to Washington."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We can't afford——"

"Can't afford! I'm sick of hearing that expression. You've used it a thousand times in the past six months. You make me feel as if I were a pauper or a thief."

"I was going to say that we couldn't afford to live in Washington as we've been living," she continued, as if she had not heard him. "When you leave here I shall take the children to my place in Waverly and pass the Winter there."

"*My place!*" he repeated, coldly. He turned away. "Yes, it is your place."

"Did you send for me to speak about the children?"

"No, I wanted to consult you about the house in Washington. I have a chance to lease it for

The Congressman's Wife

two years. Senator Wadsworth is looking for a place, and he said the other day he'd take the house whenever I wanted to rent it. I had told him I didn't feel sure of going back, and, of course, I knew how you hated the place," he concluded, harshly. "If you prefer to live somewhere else, I'm willing."

"I have made up my mind not to go back," said Helen.

"And may I ask how long you propose to keep away from Washington? Do you intend to cut yourself off from my political life altogether?"

"You know why I want to cut myself off from it," Helen replied, her voice trembling.

"I should think I did! You've rubbed that in enough. I suppose you realize what people will say?"

"There are plenty of Congressmen's wives who don't go to Washington with their husbands."

"But you've taken part in the life. You've been conspicuous."

"You can say that I didn't feel equal to entertaining this Winter, and I stayed at home to take care of my children. It will be true, too."

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He looked at her with solicitude in his face. "Do you mean that you are ill, Helen?"

"I'm sick. I'm sick of living," she broke out. "But for the children, I could wish that I——"

"Then *I* don't count in your feelings or in your life?" He hesitated, and when he spoke again it was in a tone of patience that betrayed the restraint he was putting on himself. "Helen, I think I have been pretty lenient with you so far, and if I let go now and then you can't blame me. Since that night in Washington, the night of your ball, you've been a changed woman. You keep the children away from me as if you were afraid I'd contaminate them. You have cut down our expenses and forced us all to live as if we were on the verge of poverty. You've made our house as gloomy as a tomb. Now, I warn you, look out! Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"And you propose to go on in this way?"

"That is one reason why I have decided not to go to Washington."

"I don't understand you."

"Because I saw how unhappy I made you. I thought you would be happier without me. And I can't be different—I can't!" she broke out, pas-

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sionately. "I can't live as we used to live, knowing that the money I spend——"

She checked herself. Douglas Briggs waited. "Well?" he said.

"Knowing where it comes from, Douglas," she went on, lowering her voice. He made no comment, and she added, with a change of tone: "I had hoped things might be different this morning."

He looked mystified. "Different?" he repeated.

"I hoped that you wouldn't have to go back to Washington—except for the rest of your present term."

"That I shouldn't get the nomination, do you mean?" Then he laughed. "You're a nice wife. I wonder how you'd feel if you knew what the loss of that nomination would mean to me?"

"If it meant poverty or humiliation I should have been glad to share it with you, Douglas."

He turned away from her with the impatient movement of his head that she had so often seen Jack make. "Now, please don't waste any heroics on me. But let me tell you one thing, Helen. If I hadn't been re-nominated last night I should be a ruined man. Just at present I haven't five

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thousand dollars in the world. I told you last Spring how much it cost us to live. True, last year I made twice as much as I'd made the year before; but during the past few months I've lost every cent of it."

Helen looked incredulous. Of late she often assumed an expression of mistrust at his statements that secretly enraged him. "How have you lost it?" she asked, fixing her eyes on him.

Briggs shrugged his shoulders. "By trying to make a fortune quick, just as many another man has done. I took greater risks—that's all. Perhaps you'd like to know why I did that? I did it in order to make myself independent of those men in Washington—the men you're so down on. I hoped that I could throw them off and go to you and say that I was straight."

"And you thought that would please me?" Helen asked, in a tone of deep reproach.

He drew a long breath. "Well, I don't know that anything will please you nowadays, Helen, but I thought it might."

"That the money gained by such means——"

"You don't mean to say that speculating is dishonest, do you?" he asked, with a harsh laugh.

"If the money that you speculated with had

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been honestly earned it would be bad enough, but money— Oh, why do you force me to say these things? You know perfectly well what I think.”

He turned away, with disappointment and resentment in his face. “I see that it’s useless to try to please you. Perhaps it’s just as well that you’re not going to Washington with me.”

She rose from her seat and started to leave the room; but, on an impulse, she stopped. “I suppose a woman’s way of looking at these things is different from a man’s, Douglas. A woman can’t understand how hard it is for a man—how many temptations he has. Oh, I don’t blame you, Douglas; your doing all that for me—taking all those risks, and losing everything—I do appreciate it. But if I could only make you see that it is all wrong, that I’d love you poor and disappointed, a thousand times more than successful and——”

“And dishonest!” he interrupted. “That’s what you were going to say, isn’t it? Well, I guess it’s impossible for us to agree about these matters. Anyway, I’ve got the nomination, and that means my re-election. We’ve got to take things as they come in this world.”

Helen walked slowly toward the door.

The Congressman's Wife

"Then you've made up your mind?" he said, thinking she might weaken.

"I have made up my mind not to return to Washington," she replied, without meeting his look.

Briggs turned away impatiently. "Very well, then. I'll take rooms again at the club."

When Helen had closed the door behind her Douglas Briggs sank into his chair and covered his face with his hands. After his work and worry of the past few weeks it seemed hard to him that he should be obliged to go through such a scene with his wife. For a few minutes he tortured himself with self-pity. He heard a rap at the door; but he paid no attention. He was in the mood where he wished to speak to no one, to see no one.

XV

“UNCLE DOUG!”

Briggs whirled impatiently in his chair.
“Eh?”

Fanny came forward. “Say, Uncle Doug.”

“Well, what is it?”

“What’s the matter?” Fanny asked.

Briggs frowned. “Matter!” he repeated.
“What do you mean?”

“You know. What’s the matter between auntie and you?” Fanny added, brightly. “I don’t mind your being cross with me a bit.”

Briggs softened. “My dear little girl, you mustn’t interfere with things that don’t concern you.”

Fanny’s eyes flashed. “Please *don’t!* Besides, they do concern me. Don’t you suppose I care when I see auntie come out of here with her face just as white and her eyes looking as if they were going to pop out of her head?”

The Congressman's Wife

"You see too much, Fanny."

"Well, what do you suppose my eyes were made for, anyway?" Fanny cried, indignantly. "Besides, I didn't have anything else to do. Guy'd gone away and left me."

"What did he do that for?"

"Because I told him to."

"Have you two been quarreling?" Briggs asked, severely.

"No, we haven't," Fanny replied, with an emphatic toss of her head. "I told him he'd better go and attend to your business, instead of billing and cooing with me. There were a lot of people who wanted to see you. So, as you were busy," she concluded with importance, "of course Guy had to represent you."

Briggs rose hastily. "Where are they?" he asked.

As Fanny did not like the tone of the question, she kept her uncle waiting for a moment. "In the library," she finally conceded.

"It's probably Monahan and his gang," said Briggs, hurrying out of the room. "I forgot to ask Michael——"

"Well, then, tell Guy—" Fanny called after him, but he disappeared before she had time to

The Congressman's Wife

finish the sentence. She stood disconsolate in the middle of the room. "Nobody seems to care for me around here," she said. "I've a good mind to go home." Then she turned and saw Guy Fullerton smiling at her.

"Hello, Fan!" he said.

Fanny promptly turned her back on him.

"Everything seems to be going wrong this morning," she said. "I almost wish I hadn't come."

"Oh, you do, do you?" Guy walked to the opposite side of the room, dropped into a chair and rested his head on his hand.

"Now, don't you go and be silly," cried Fanny, glancing at him over her shoulder.

Guy looked relieved. "I thought you were mad with me. Oh, that's all right, then. If you could only have some sort of sign to show just *who* you're mad with, you know! Fan," he went on, softly, "as long as we're alone, can't we—can't we fix it up? You and—" He touched his chest with his forefinger.

Fanny gave a little jump. Her eyes beamed. "Sir," she cried, "is this a proposal?" Then she added, in a tone of disappointment: "Does it come like this?"

The Congressman's Wife

"You know I've been awfully fond of you for a long time," Guy pleaded.

Fanny smiled into his face. "How long?"

"Well, since last Winter. Since those days we went skating together."

Fanny clasped her hands rapturously. "Weren't they glorious! Well, I'll say one thing for you, you're a good *skater*." Then she rolled her eyes. "But your dancing!"

"Will you?" said Guy, plaintively.

Fanny dropped into a chair and let her hands rest in her lap. She grew very thoughtful. "I'll think about it," she said.

"Think about it!" Guy repeated, derisively.

Fanny assumed an injured air. "Yes, they always say that in books. I'm going to do this in the proper way, even if you don't."

Guy looked disconsolate. "Oh, you never take a fellow seriously."

"Don't I?" This time Fanny's voice had the ring of sincerity. "Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Just say we're engaged, can't you?" Guy pleaded.

Fanny rose and drew herself up with dignity.

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"You must speak to my father," she said, with a demure bow.

"Oh, there you are again! You won't take me seriously for one consecutive minute."

Fanny clasped her hands again and held them extended before her. "I have an idea. Let's pretend that I'm dad. That'll be great. Now here's dad, walking up and down the library. That's what he always used to do whenever I got into a scrape and the governess sent me to him." She cleared her throat and thrust her hand into her shirt-waist. "Well, sir?" she said, in a deep voice.

"Oh, say, now!" Guy exclaimed, in disgust.

Fanny held her head on one side and made a warning gesture. "Oh, I'm serious about this. You must answer my questions if you want to please me. If you don't, I'll say 'No' outright, and I'll get Uncle Doug to discharge you. So you'd better look out, or you'll lose your job."

In spite of himself, Guy smiled. "All right," he said, to humor her. "Fire away!"

Fanny cleared her throat again and threw back her shoulders. "Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

The Congressman's Wife

Guy tried to mimic her assumed voice. "You can give me your child, sir."

Fanny glared at him. "Now you know very well you wouldn't talk like that!" she said with disgust in her tone. She shook her head and drew her lips tightly together. "I guess you don't know dad. M'm."

"Well, what would I say?"

"Something foolish, I suppose," Fanny replied, carelessly. "But this is what you ought to say," she went on, with elaborate politeness, and assuming a romantic attitude. "Sir, I love your beautiful daughter, Miss Fanny, and I ask your permission to make her my wife."

Guy groaned, bending forward till his fingers nearly touched the floor.

"But it takes an awfully fascinating man to talk like that. Now let's go on." Fanny burlesqued her father's manner again. "So you want to marry Fanny, do you? Well, since she's been out of school, you're about the tenth man who has asked——"

"What? Do you mean to say that all last Summer, while I was slaving down in Washington——?"

"This time my father would tell you to leave

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the house," said Fanny, haughtily, with a wave of her hand.

"Now, look here, I don't like this game," Guy declared.

"But I like it. Therefore it goes. Now don't be a silly boy. You might as well get used to dad's ways first as last. Ahem! As I said, you are the—er—the eleventh. Now, what claim have you on my daughter?"

Guy seized the chance. "She's head and ears in love with me," he cried, before she had time to stop him. "She can't live without me."

Fanny seized a book and held it in the air. "Do you know what dad would do if you said that? He'd pack me home to Ashburnham, and I'd have to stay there all Winter."

"I had to tell the truth, didn't I?" Guy asked, meekly.

"Well, dad wouldn't believe you, anyway," Fanny replied. Her voice deepened again. "Young man, since you are thinking of getting married, I presume you are in a position to support a wife. What is your income?"

Guy looked serious. "I guess I won't play any more. This is becoming too personal."

The Congressman's Wife

Fanny held her hand at her ear. "I didn't quite catch what you said. *Five* thousand?"

"*One* thousand, since you're determined to know, inquisitive; one thousand and keep," Guy replied, snappishly. "I don't even have to pay my laundry bills. That's just twenty dollars a week spending money."

The light faded from Fanny's eyes. "And you've been sending me all those flowers on that?"

"Well, flowers don't cost so much in Summer. I intended to stop when the cold weather came."

"But, Guy, dear, I thought you got ever so much more than that! You poor thing! Why, I spend twice as much as that myself, and I'm always sending home for more."

"Well, I can't help it if I'm not rich," Guy grumbled, keeping his face turned from her.

Fanny inspected him carefully, as if taking an inventory. "Do you know what dad would do?" she asked. Guy knew that her eyes were on him; but he refused to look at her.

"Eh?" he said.

"If you told him how much you were earning," Fanny explained.

"Oh, he'd faint away, I suppose!"

The Congressman's Wife

Fanny shook her head. "No, he wouldn't," she replied, sadly. "He'd just laugh that big laugh of his. He has enormous teeth. Remember 'em? It's fascinating to watch 'em. His sense of humor is awful!"

Guy sighed. "I suppose I might as well give you up," he said, remembering vaguely that he had read of a young and interesting lover who used that speech on a similar occasion.

"Well, I guess not!" Fanny exclaimed. Then she clasped her hands over her mouth. "Oh, I s'pose I do kind of like you."

"Why don't you treat me better, then?" he asked pathetically.

Fanny lowered her head and looked up at him with mournful eyes. "You're awfully interesting when you're sad like this," she said with satirical admiration.

Guy twisted impatiently. "Oh!" he exclaimed.

Fanny walked toward him and began to play with the buttons on his coat. "Say, Guy, what did you take this place for—this place with Uncle Doug?"

"I thought it would be a good place to see life."

"To see life!" Fanny repeated, scornfully.



“‘And you’ve been sending me all those flowers on that?’”

The Congressman's Wife

"M'm—h'm! And to get into politics, perhaps."

Fanny burst out laughing. "You! You get into politics?"

Guy looked injured. "I don't see anything funny about that."

"And do the things that Uncle Doug does?" Fanny cried.

"Yes," said Guy, in a loud voice.

Fanny seized him by both arms. "Now, look here. You're no more fit for politics than—well, than dad is, and the mere sight of a politician makes dad froth at the mouth. Oh, he says awful things about 'em!"

"Then he hates your uncle, does he?"

"No, he doesn't, stupid!" Fanny cried, shaking him. "But he says Uncle Doug made the greatest mistake of his life when he went into politics. It spoiled him as a lawyer."

"Well, what's all this got to do with us?" Guy asked, drawing away.

"*Us!*" Fanny repeated rapturously. "Isn't that a nice word? Dad would never let *us*—well, you know—if you were going to stick to politics, not to mention the twenty a week."

"What can I do, then? I'm not clever, like

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other fellows. Don't you suppose I know I'd have lost my position long ago if your uncle wasn't the best man in the world? "

Fanny began to bite the tips of her fingers. "I guess I'll have to speak to dad myself," she said, slowly. "I'll make him give you a job in the factory."

"In the factory?" Guy exclaimed, horror-stricken.

Fanny turned upon him indignantly. "Yes. You don't mean to say! Well, you'll have to get over those notions. I suppose you got 'em at college. Dad'll make you put on overalls and begin at the bottom. Oh, dad's awfully thorough."

Guy considered the matter. "How much would he give me? "

"Lots of fellows begin at three dollars a week," said Fanny. Guy looked at her reproachfully. "Perhaps through influence you may be able to get as much as ten." Then Fanny went on: "Now, look here. Dad's always been sorry that I wasn't a boy, so that I could take the business, and all that. But I guess I'll take it, all the same. Only you'll be my representative. See? After you've learned how to run things, dad may put you in charge of the New York office. Won't it

The Congressman's Wife

be grand? We'll have a box at the opera and we'll—" Fanny stopped. Her aunt stood at the door. "Oh, auntie, how much does it cost to keep house in New York?"

Helen Briggs smiled. "That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether you live in a house or an apartment—on the way you live—on a thousand things."

"To live well, I mean. How much does this house cost a year?"

"The rent is three thousand."

Fanny grew limp. "Ugh!" she cried, shuddering.

"But of course there are plenty of smaller houses much cheaper," Helen added.

"It's an awfully expensive place, New York, isn't it?" said Fanny, with a plaintive glance at Guy.

"Yes, awfully," Helen smiled.

"It makes Ashburnham seem almost attractive, doesn't it?" Fanny went on.

Helen looked up suspiciously. "What do you want to know all these things for?"

"Oh!" Fanny turned away inconsequently. Then she faced her aunt again. "You couldn't

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possibly live *well* on twenty dollars a week, could you?"

"No; not possibly," Helen replied, with a smile.

"I don't see how so many people can afford to get married," said Fanny ruefully.

XVI

WHEN Douglas Briggs returned to the library he wore the cheerful look of the man who has just accomplished a difficult task. "Well, I got those fellows off at last," he said.

"Who were they, Uncle Doug?"

Briggs smiled grimly. "They were gentlemen who are commonly known as heelers. And they called to let me know that I hadn't been quite generous enough to them."

Fanny looked mystified. Her eyes blinked. "How generous?"

"I hadn't secured enough places for their friends—jobs."

Fanny glanced dolefully at Guy. Then her eyes turned toward her uncle. "It's awful hard to get a job just now, isn't it?" she asked, pathetically.

"Is it?" said Briggs, in a tone of surprise. "Do you know of anybody that wants one?"

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"Yes, I do," Fanny replied. "But he's going to get it all right," she added, with confidence.

Briggs extended both hands. "If there's anything I can do—" he said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"No. I guess you have trouble enough. Oh, yes, you can do something nice—you can let Guy take me out for a drive."

"But I've got a lot of work this morning," Guy protested, with a look in his face that revealed the spirit of the early martyrs.

Briggs had taken his seat at the desk and had begun to work again. "Never mind," he said. "It'll keep. The drive'll do you good."

Guy hesitated between pleasure and duty. "Oh, well," he said, glancing from his employer to his employer's niece.

"You come with us, auntie," Fanny urged, with an air that made Guy's coming inevitable.

"No, I mustn't," Helen replied, decidedly. "I have too much to do this morning."

As Fanny turned to the door Michael entered. "Mr. Burrell's in the library, sir," he said to Douglas Briggs. "He didn't want to disturb you till he was sure you weren't busy. His wife is with him, and the young ladies."

The Congressman's Wife

"Ugh!" cried Fanny, seizing Guy by the arm. "Let's get out, quick."

Briggs rose. "I'll go in," he said, glancing at Helen with resignation in his tone. "They'll want to see you, too, Helen. I'll bring them in here."

Mrs. Briggs turned to Michael. "You might bring some of the sherry, Michael. Oh, I forgot—they won't want anything. Never mind. Mr. Briggs will ring if he wants something for Mr. Burrell. Here they are now."

Helen walked forward and received Mrs. Burrell and the three daughters. Mrs. Burrell was dressed with an elaborate adherence to the fashion of the hour, which had the effect of making conspicuous her extreme angularity. Carrie Cora wore a fantastic gown that betrayed fidelity to the local dressmaker. The two younger girls, however, looked charming in their pretty, tailor-made suits, plainly expressive of New York. "This is nice," said Helen, offering her hand to Mrs. Burrell. "When did you come to New York?"

"Just got here this morning," Mrs. Burrell replied. "You see we didn't waste any time coming to see you."

"It's that confounded old law business again,

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Mrs. Briggs," Burrell explained, in his high voice. His spare figure had been almost hidden by his eldest daughter's ample proportions.

"I've done my best for you, Mr. Burrell," Helen explained, smiling.

Mrs. Burrell raised her hand in a gesture of despair. "Father does nothing but talk about that case. I declare I'm sick of hearing about it!"

Burrell gave Helen a meaning look. "Well, I guess she'd be sicker if I was to lose my patents," he said, slowly. "I ain't countin' on goin' to the poorhouse yet awhile. You'd think, by the way Mrs. Burrell talks, a little matter of a hundred thousand dollars wasn't worth fightin' over."

"Does it mean as much as that to you?" asked Douglas Briggs, astonished. He had never been able to adjust himself to the knowledge that the little Congressman, so out of place in Washington, was a man of wealth and, in his own city, of great importance.

"Well, I should think it did, and more, too," Burrell replied. "If a certain friend of mine was to take the case," he went on, smiling at Helen and nodding at her husband, "it would be worth a retainin' fee of five thousand dollars."

The Congressman's Wife

Briggs shook his head. "That's a great temptation. I need the money bad enough."

"Well, then, take the case," Burrell exclaimed.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, do take it, Mr. Briggs!" Mrs. Burrell interposed. "Father says if it was only in your hands he wouldn't worry. Then we'd have some peace in the family."

Briggs looked amused. Secretly he enjoyed the flattery of the old lady's words. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take it——"

"Oh, good!" the girls cried, together.

"—if I'm beaten at the next election."

The girls looked at each other with disappointment in their eyes. "Oh!" they said.

Briggs put his hand on Burrell's shoulder. "Can you wait?"

"Well, the case don't come on till December," Burrell replied. "I guess I could wait all right, only the' ain't no chance of you gettin' beaten."

"Well, I guess we don't want you to be beaten, Mr. Briggs," Mrs. Burrell cried, resentfully. "You're forgettin' your manners, father."

"Oh, that's all right," Briggs exclaimed, patting Burrell on the back. "No harm done, Mrs. Burrell. This husband of yours overrates me, that's all. There are hundreds of men right here

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in New York who could handle that case better than I could." He took the old man affectionately by the arm. "Look here, Burrell," he said, confidentially, "don't you think we're in the way of these ladies? They probably have a lot to talk about that they don't want us to hear."

Burrell understood at once. "I was thinkin' of that myself," he replied.

Mrs. Burrell held up three fingers. "Now, father," she cried, "you know all you've had already."

"My dear lady, don't you be disagreeable," said Briggs, smiling. "I haven't seen your husband for six months."

Mrs. Burrell softened. "Well, just one, father, and put plenty of soda-water in it."

Briggs nodded his acknowledgment of the concession. "There! Come on, Burrell."

As the two men left the room Mrs. Burrell exclaimed: "I declare, Mrs. Briggs, that husband of yours can just twirl me round his little finger."

"Come over here and sit down, Mrs. Burrell," Helen said. "You have something to tell me, haven't you? I can see it in your face."

Mrs. Burrell beamed. "I guess you can see it in Carrie Cora's face. Eh, girls?"

The Congressman's Wife

"I should think so!" Emeline and Gladys cried together.

"It's true, then? There is something?" Helen asked.

Carrie Cora's face flushed violently. "Yes," the girl replied, lifting her gloved hand to her forehead.

"Don't be a ninny, Carrie Cora!" Mrs. Burrell exclaimed.

Helen held out her hand. "It's all settled?" she asked.

Carrie Cora looked up shyly. "Yes." Then she cast her eyes down again.

"I'm so glad, dear," said Helen, bending forward and kissing her.

"Well, it was you that did it, Mrs. Briggs!" Mrs. Burrell cried, in a loud voice, as if to keep the situation from becoming sentimental. "I might as well give you the credit. That talkin' to you gave me that day after your ball just opened my eyes. I suppose I *am* kind of a cross old thing, and—well, I didn't understand Rufus James. The family's always been poor and good-for-nothing. But Rufus, he's got lots of spunk. Why, at first he wouldn't come to the house—even when I said he could. You'd think he was a prince, the way

The Congressman's Wife

he acted. And he's doin' real well. He's had a raise in his salary, and he ain't lettin' father do a thing for him."

"And is it to be soon?" Helen asked.

"The third of next month," Emeline and Gladys cried together.

"And we want you to come, Mrs. Briggs," said Carrie Cora, recovering from her embarrassment.

"It's going to be a church affair," said Mrs. Burrell, severely, smoothing the front of her dress. This was one of the moments when Mrs. Burrell betrayed that the possession of plenty of money was still novel to her.

"Oh, do come, Mrs. Briggs," Gladys pleaded.

"Yes, please," Emeline echoed.

Helen hesitated. "I don't know whether I can."

"Oh, promise. Please promise," Carrie Cora insisted.

"If I can, I will," Helen replied, feeling ashamed. She knew that her husband would not entertain the notion for an instant.

"And, of course, you'll stay at our house," Mrs. Burrell went on. "We've had a wing built on this Winter. It's just like that wing on yours in Washington."

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"And the furniture's just like yours, too," said Carrie Cora. "We got it in Portland. They say it's real antique. Lots of it has come from old houses in Portland and from all kinds of queer places in the country."

Mrs. Burrell looked proudly at her eldest daughter. "Ain't she changed, though?" she said, glancing at Helen. "You'd hardly know her, would you? The way she's brightened up since Rufus James began to come to the house. Dear me! I used to say to father that I didn't know what we was goin' to do with her."

Helen smiled at Carrie Cora. "But we've always understood each other, haven't we, dear?"

"Yes, always, Mrs. Briggs," the girl replied.

"And what d'you suppose?" Mrs. Burrell went on. "Rufus James didn't want Carrie Cora to have any trousseau. He said he didn't propose to have people say he was marryin' her because her father had money. Did you ever hear anything like that? Father was so mad! - But I must say I kind of liked him for it. But I up and told him I'd attend to all those things myself, an' it was none of his business, anyway. That's what we're here in New York for," she added, lowering her voice as if afraid of being overheard by

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the men in the other room. "Father didn't let on, but he cares ever so much more about Carrie Cora than for that old law case he's always talkin' about. It's goin' to be white satin—the weddin' dress—with real Valenceens lace, an' she's goin' to come out in pearl-colored silk." Mrs. Burrell stopped at the sound of steps in the hall. "Oh, here they are back again! It must be almost time for us to be goin'! We've got lots of shoppin' to do."

Douglas Briggs walked over to Carrie Cora. "Well, young lady, I've heard the news," he said. He placed both hands on the big girl's head. "Now, I'm a good deal older than you, and you won't mind," he went on, kissing her between the eyes. "I hope he's worthy of you, my dear."

"I hope I'm worthy of him, Mr. Briggs," Carrie Cora stammered, through her embarrassment. At that moment she looked pretty.

Briggs patted her hand. "My dear child, no man is worth half as much as a nice girl like you."

"Now, don't you go to spoilin' my children, Mr. Briggs," Mrs. Burrell exclaimed, rising. "Come on, father."

Helen rose at the same moment. "But we'll

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see you again, of course. Come to dinner to-night, won't you?"

The girls looked delighted. "Oh!" they exclaimed.

Mrs. Burrell assumed an expression of severity.

"No, we won't. You've got enough on your hands, with all these political people pilin' in on you. I guess I know what it is. We'll come to say good-bye, if we can, to-morrow some time. Father says he's got to get back Thursday."

"But we'd like to have you, really," said Helen, smiling.

Mrs. Burrell remained firm. "No. You're too good. That's the only trouble with you. Well, good-bye."

"You'll come to the wedding, won't you, Mr. Briggs?" said Carrie Cora.

Briggs waved his hand toward Helen. "Ask the lady," he said.

"She said she'd come if she could," Carrie Cora declared.

"Well, I'll come if I can. Good-bye."

He followed them to the door, and he had the air of dismissing them with an almost benign courtesy. When they had disappeared with Helen his face took on an expression of utter weariness.

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"What a nuisance!" he said to himself. "I sha'n't get a stroke of work done to-day." He sat at his desk and pressed his fingers over his eyes. His little exhibitions of hypocrisy made him very uncomfortable now, chiefly because he knew that his wife took note of them. After a moment he sat upright and nerved himself to go on with his work. But he had not been alone for five minutes when Michael interrupted again.

"The gentlemen that left a few minutes ago have come back, sir."

"They have?" he said, resentfully, as if Michael were to blame. "What do they want?"

"They want to speak to you a minute, sir," the servant replied, in a defensive voice.

Briggs uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Show them in here," he said, looking down at the pile of letters on his desk. Then he stood up and waited for his callers. They came in slowly, as if afraid of treading on one another's heels; that is, all but one, the youngest and best dressed, a rather handsome fellow of about twenty-eight.

"Well, gentlemen?" Briggs remarked, pleasantly. The look of fatigue and resentment had disappeared from his face. His eye singled out the young fellow, as if expecting him to speak.

The Congressman's Wife

But it was the oldest of the group, a tall, thin man, with a smooth face and heavy, white hair, who spoke first. He had a deprecating manner, a hoarse voice and a faint brogue.

"We've come back to have another little talk with you, Mr. Briggs," he said.

"All right, Mr. Monahan. Sit down, gentlemen, won't you?" They all glanced at the chairs and remained standing.

"We didn't know just what reply to make to your remarks a few minutes ago till we put our heads together," Monahan continued.

"Well, what decision have you come to?" Briggs asked, cheerfully.

Monahan hesitated. "Well, the fact is——"

The young fellow broke in. "We're not satisfied," he said, fiercely. "We think you ought to make us a more definite promise."

"That's it," Monahan cried, for an instant growing bolder.

They scowled at one another.

Mr. Briggs directed his look toward the young man. "I think I made no promise to you, Mr. Ferris," he said, in a low voice.

"That's just the trouble," Ferris exclaimed. "We worked hard for you last night, and now we

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don't propose to be put off with any vague talk." His lip curled scornfully and showed fine, white teeth.

"You're a little indefinite yourself, now, Mr. Ferris."

"Well, then, I won't be," Ferris cried. "We nominated and elected you two years ago, and you went back on us."

"How was that?" Briggs said, as if merely curious. His manner seemed to exasperate Ferris.

"You didn't do a thing for us. We asked you for places, and you let 'em all go to the Civil Service men."

"I had to observe the law," Briggs answered, in the tone he had used before.

"Aw!" Ferris exchanged glances with his companions. "You know just as well as I do that you could have given those places to the men that had worked for you. But we'll say nothing about that just now," he went on, extending his right hand, with the palm turned toward the floor. "That's off. We would have paid you back all right last night if Mr. Stone hadn't promised you'd stand by us. He smoothed it over, and he said you realized your mistake, and all that."

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"That's right, he did," Monahan corroborated, huskily.

"He said you told him yourself," cried one of the others, a sallow-faced man with thin, black hair.

"I did? When was that, Mr. Long?"

"Down in Washington," Long replied. "The night you were having a blow-out."

For a moment Douglas Briggs was silent. "I don't remember ever having made such a promise," he replied, thoughtfully.

Ferris laughed bitterly. "Listen to that, will you?"

"I should have no right to make any such promise," Briggs continued. "And I can only repeat what I said a few moments ago. I've pledged myself to support the Civil Service. I told you that last night."

"Oh, what did that amount to?" said Ferris, with disgust.

"That was just a bluff," Long exclaimed.

Briggs smiled. "If you believe that was a bluff, I can't see why you should consider my promise worth anything."

"Well, there are five of us here," said Ferris, in a surly tone.

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"I see. Witnesses!" Briggs shrugged his shoulders. "I'll tell you what I will do for you. If any places come my way that aren't covered by the Civil Service, you shall have them."

Ferris looked at Briggs with open contempt. "We might as well tell you, sir, we're not satisfied with the way you've treated us. An' with your record, you've got no right to put on any high an' mighty airs."

Monahan turned to remonstrate with Ferris.

"What do you mean by that?" said Briggs, looking sternly at the young fellow.

Monahan extended his hand toward Briggs. "He's just talkin' a little wild, that's all," he said, bowing and gesticulating. "He don't mean anything. We wanted to let you know how we felt. We didn't quite explain that a few moments ago."

"I understand very well how you gentlemen feel, and I'd help you if I could. I only wish I could make you see that I can't do what's impossible."

Monahan started for the door, followed by the others, one of whom stumbled over a piece of furniture. "Think it over, sir, think it over," he said, bowing and holding his cap in both hands.

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"I can promise to do that," Briggs replied.

For several moments after his visitors left Briggs stood motionless at his table. He appreciated the full significance of the opposition to him within his own party; it might mean his defeat; so far back as the previous Spring Stone had foreseen this situation. But he said to himself that he could not have acted differently. He had done his best to serve the party in all legitimate ways; but those heelers cared only for their own selfish interests. Then he realized bitterly that he had made the mistake of trying to play a double game: he had been a straddler. If he had followed a straight course, if he had acted on his convictions, he might now have the satisfaction of feeling that he had been too good for his party. It was chiefly in order to atone to his own conscience for the dishonest work he had done that he had refused to cater to the lower elements of the party. Now he saw that his scrupulousness was less an expression of honesty than of pride. He was in one of those moods when he judged himself far more harshly than he would have judged another man in his own position, when he lost faith in the sincerity of any of his motives. However, he thought, now he had taken his stand

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he could maintain it. Those fellows would give him a hard fight; but he was ready for it. His resentment was aroused; he returned to his desk with new energy, as if the contest were already begun.

A few minutes later Michael entered with a letter. "Sam just brought this, sir," he said, and left the room.

Briggs glanced at the address and recognized Franklin West's handwriting. He tore open the letter hastily. He had a feeling that it might contain disagreeable news. His eyes ran swiftly over the lines.

"Your man has come just as I am leaving for Boston. Sorry I can't go back with him. I came over to New York for only a few hours. But I'll be back in three or four days, when, of course, I shall give myself the pleasure of seeing you. Congratulations on your nomination, if you will accept congratulations on a dead sure thing."

For a moment Briggs had a sensation of chill. It was like a premonition. Was it possible that Franklin West was going back on him, too? But he put the thought aside as absurd. It would not have occurred to him if he were not tired out and

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if he had not had that interview with the heelers. Still, it was odd that West should have hurried through New York without calling. It would have been simple and natural for him to stop for breakfast at the house where he had so often received hospitality. Still, Briggs thought, philosophically, it was a relief not to be obliged to see him.

For the rest of the morning, however, he felt uncomfortable. At luncheon he had an impulse to speak of West to his wife, but he checked it. He found it hard to start any new subject with her now.

XVII

Two days later, while Douglas Briggs was smoking his after-dinner cigar in the library and chatting with Fanny Wallace, whose presence in the house greatly relieved the embarrassment of his strained relations with his wife, Michael entered and announced Mr. Farley. "There are two gentlemen with him, sir," said Michael, "Mr. De Witt and Mr. Saunders."

Briggs flushed. "Ah!" he said, as if the callers had suddenly assumed importance in his eyes.

"Where are they?" he asked, rising hastily.

"In the study, sir."

"All right. I'll go in."

"Give my love to that nice Mr. Farley," Fanny called after him.

As Briggs entered the room Farley rose with the boyish embarrassment of manner that years of newspaper work had not changed. He introduced his friends. De Witt, a tall, slim young man, with a sweeping brown mustache and a long,

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well-cut face, took his host's hand smilingly. Saunders, shorter, smooth-faced and keen-eyed, glanced at Briggs with a look not altogether free from suspicion. In Saunders Briggs recognized a type of political reformer that always made him nervous.

"De Witt and Saunders are of the Citizens' Club," Farley explained. "In fact, we're all of the Citizens' Club," he added, with the air of making a joke.

"I'm very glad to see you, gentlemen. Won't you sit down? I caught a glimpse of you at the reporters' table at the caucus the other night, Farley."

"Hot time, wasn't it?"

Briggs took from the table a box of cigars, which he offered to his callers. De Witt and Saunders shook their heads and mumbled thanks. Farley took a cigar and smoked with his host.

"Well, Congressman," said Farley, "we haven't come merely to take up your time."

Briggs smiled and nodded.

"We've come to ask you some questions," Farley continued.

"You always were great on questions, Farley," said Briggs, with a laugh.

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"We've been having a racket over you down at the Citizens' Club," Farley began, and Briggs glanced smilingly at De Witt and Saunders.

"Farley has made the racket," Saunders interposed.

"I've been trying to persuade those fellows that you're a much misunderstood man," said Farley, his manner growing more earnest.

"So we've come here to try to understand you, Congressman," De Witt explained, amiably.

Douglas Briggs continued to look amused. "Anything I can do, gentlemen," he said, with an encouraging gesture.

"I know I needn't tell you that I've always believed in you, Congressman," Farley remarked.

"You've been a good friend, Farley. I've always appreciated that."

Farley leaned back in his chair. "The fellows have been—well, bothered by those stories the papers have been publishing about you. It's because they don't know you. They don't know, as I do, that you're incapable of any dirty work."

"Thank you, Farley," said Briggs, in a low voice.

"Well, matters came to a head last night at the club when we talked over your renomination. To

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be perfectly frank, a good many of our men thought Williams was going to get the nomination, and, if he had got it, we were going to make him our candidate, too."

Douglas Briggs laughed. "You *are* frank, Farley. So, now that I have the nomination, you're all at sea. Is that the idea?"

"We can't stand the opposition candidate!" said De Witt.

Saunders shook his head. "No; Bruce is too much for our stomachs. He's out of the question altogether."

"So we'll have to choose between endorsing you or putting up a candidate of our own," Farley went on. "In fact, that is what most of the men want to do."

"You want to help to elect Bruce, you mean?" said Briggs, pleasantly.

"That's what it would amount to," De Witt acknowledged.

Briggs hesitated. "Gentlemen, you are placing me in a very delicate position," he said at last. "What can I do?"

"You can give my friends here some assurances, Congressman," said Farley.

"What assurances?"

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"In the first place, you can give us your word that those stories in the opposition papers are false."

Briggs rose slowly from his seat. His face grew pale. After a long silence, he said: "Farley, do you remember what I said to you last Spring, when you asked me to deny those stories? I said they were too contemptible to be noticed!"

Farley looked disappointed. "Then you won't help us? You won't help me in the fight I've been making for you?"

"Gentlemen," Douglas Briggs went on, speaking slowly and impressively. "I know perfectly well what you are driving at, and I'm going to try to meet you halfway. But I'm a man as well as a politician, and you can't blame me if I resent being placed on the rack like a criminal. However, I appreciate your motives in coming here, and I'm grateful to Farley for all he's done for me. Let me say this, once for all: If I am elected I shall go back to Congress with clean hands and with a clear conscience, ready to do my duty wherever I see it. Within the past few months my relations with Franklin West have been the subject of newspaper talk. West has been my

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personal friend. I have trusted him and respected him. Lately I have discovered that he is a scoundrel. He is coming here this morning, and I shall give myself the pleasure of telling him so. Now, gentlemen, if you honor me with an endorsement, I pledge my word that you will find me in perfect sympathy with the work you're doing." He stopped, his lips tightening. "I confess that I shouldn't have the courage to say these things, to humble myself like this, but for this good fellow here. I only wish there were more like him."

Farley smiled. "Well, Congressman, I knew you'd see through West some day."

"Now, gentlemen, you have asked me for some assurances," Briggs continued. "I might as well tell you frankly that I can only give you the assurance of my good faith, of my honesty of intention. I've made blunders in my career so far that I shall regret to my dying day. I've been the target of the sensational newspapers; but I don't mind that. Many of the stories printed about me, I can honestly say, have been absolute calumnies. Some of the censure has been deserved. I suppose that the lesson of politics can't be learned in a day. At any rate, it has taken me several

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bitter years to learn it, and I'm not sure that I've learned it all yet. But no matter how great my mistakes have been, in my heart I've always been in sympathy with clean politics. You know as well as I do that for the past few years I've been getting farther and farther away from my party. The other night I secured my nomination in the teeth of pretty strenuous opposition. Just now I have reason to believe that in the coming campaign I shall have to meet as enemies men who have been my strongest friends. As you probably know, a good many of my East Side supporters have gone back on me. This means a big loss. Even with the strength you might give me, my election would be doubtful. So, if you support me, you'll gain very little for yourselves, I can tell you that. We might as well look the situation in the face, you know."

"Well, sir, the more enemies you make among the machine men the more willing we are to stand by you, Congressman," said Farley. "The harder the fight the better we like it."

"That's very consoling, Farley. Only you fellows had better go slow before you decide to try to whitewash me. To tell the truth, I don't feel quite fit for your company. I'm not good enough

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for you. I've been a good deal of a machine man myself, you know."

Farley laughed. "That's all right. We haven't any objections to the machine. We only object to the men who are running it just at present."

"I don't think it's necessary to keep you on the rack any longer," said De Witt, rising.

The others rose too.

"Thank you," said Briggs, with a smile. "Will any of you gentlemen have a—? I always hesitate in asking any members of the Citizens' Club."

"No, thank you," said Saunders. "Too early in the morning."

The others shook their heads.

"You'll probably hear from us before long," said Farley, at the door.

XVIII

THE next morning after breakfast Helen Briggs followed her husband into the study. "I want to speak to you, Douglas," she said.

"Well?" He looked embarrassed, as he always did now on finding himself alone with her.

"It is about this house," she went on. "Have you done anything about renting it this Winter?"

"No," he replied, betraying a little impatience. "I've had other things to think about. Besides, I shall be over here now and then."

"But it would hardly pay to keep the house open for that," she insisted, gently. "Besides, it would be gloomy for you here——"

"Alone?" he said, sharply, looking up at her. "Yes," he repeated, dryly, "it would be lonely." He lifted his hand to his head. "I suppose you're right about that," he sighed. "I'll speak to an agent to-morrow. We can doubtless rent it fur-

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nished. Still, it's a little late in the season," he concluded, vaguely.

"I shall want to have some of our things sent to Waverly," she said. "I thought I would begin to get them together to-day."

"Oh, don't begin to break up till we're ready to get out of here!" he exclaimed. "Wait till after the election. Besides, I expect Franklin West over in a few days, and I don't want him to come into an empty house." He was glad of the chance to mention West's coming in this indirect way. He kept his eyes turned from his wife.

After a moment of silence she said, in a low voice: "He is coming here?"

He gave her a quick glance. "Yes; why not?"

She moved slightly, but she did not answer. She grew slightly paler.

"I know you don't like him," he went on, angry with himself for taking an apologetic attitude, "but surely you won't object to his staying here a day or two. You've never objected before."

"I didn't know him then as I do now," she said.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, angrily. Then, when he saw that she had no reply

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to make, he went on, in a more conciliatory tone: "It will be impossible for me to avoid asking him. You know perfectly well——"

The blood had rushed to her face. "If he comes, Douglas," she said, "I can't stay here."

He walked swiftly toward her and rested his hand on one of the chairs. His eyes shone. "I've stood enough of this behavior from you, Helen, and now I'm going to put my foot down. You sha'n't stir out of this house. You'll stay here, and you'll receive Franklin West as you receive all my other friends. He knows you're here, and I don't propose to allow him to be insulted by your leaving. Do you understand?"

Helen bowed. "Perfectly," she said, in a whisper.

"Then you'll do as I say?"

"No," she replied, quietly. "I'll go. I'll leave this very morning."

"Then if you leave," he said, "you'll leave for good."

"As you please." Helen turned and walked slowly toward the door. He watched her angrily. As she opened the door she leaned against it heavily and caught her breath in a sob.

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He stepped forward quickly and took her in his arms. "Helen," he cried, brokenly, "I didn't mean that! I didn't know what I was saying! It's because I love you that I'm so harsh with you. Can't you see I've been in hell ever since this trouble began? Everything I've done has been done for you. I've made mistakes. I've done wrong. I've got into a terrible mess. But God knows I want to get out of it; and I will get out of it, if you'll only have patience. I hate that man West as much as you do. But I can't throw him down now. It would mean ruin for me. Only listen to reason, won't you? Besides, you haven't anything against West. Hasn't he always treated you civilly?" He hesitated, watching the tears that ran down her cheeks. "Well, hasn't he? Answer me, Helen."

She drew herself away from him. She had a sudden temptation to tell him the whole truth. It seemed for an instant as if this avowal might clear up the whole trouble between them. Then she thought of what the other consequences might be, and she checked herself. "I can't tell you, Douglas. You must not ask me to meet him again. I can't look him in the face. The mere sight of him terrifies me."

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He looked helplessly at her, thinking that he understood the full meaning of her words. Then he turned away. "I never thought I should drag you into this, Helen," he said, bitterly. "I—I don't blame you. Of course, I know it is all my fault."

"Then why not undo this fault?" she cried. "Why not——?"

He held out his hand despairingly. "Don't!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand. You can't. You women never can."

She dried her eyes and was about to leave the room. "Since you are determined not to have him here," her husband remarked, with a resumption of reproach in his tone, "I'll not ask him to stay. I'll offer some excuse."

During the rest of the day they did not refer to West again. The next morning Briggs looked for a letter from him from Boston, but none came. Two days later he received a brief note that West had dictated to his stenographer in Washington. Pressing business had called him home; he had not even stopped over in New York. So that scene with Helen might have been avoided, after all, Briggs thought, with a sigh. He tried to forget about the episode, however, and during the

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next few days the pressure of campaign work absorbed him. The Citizens' Club had endorsed his candidacy, and their support, he believed, would more than counterbalance the opposition within his own party. During the day he either received the crowds of importunate visitors, chiefly constituents with axes to grind, who seemed to think his time belonged to them, or he was working up the speeches that he was to deliver at night. He had long before ceased to write out what he intended to say; a few notes written on a card gave him all the cues he needed. He spent considerable time, however, in poring over statistics and over newspapers, from which he culled most of his material.

One morning, about two weeks before the election was to be held, Michael appeared in the library with a card and the announcement that the lady was waiting in the reception room.

"Miss Wing!" said Briggs, absently. "Where have I seen that name? What can she want with me?" Then his face brightened. "Oh, yes, I remember." He looked serious again. "Why should she come here, to take up my time? I don't believe I— Well, show her in, Michael," he said, impatiently.

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Miss Wing wore one of her most extravagant frocks. When Douglas Briggs offered his hand and greeted her, her face grew radiant.

"How good of you to remember me, Congressman. But then it's part of your business to remember people, isn't it?" she said, archly.

"It's pretty hard work sometimes. But I remember you perfectly."

"That's very flattering, I'm sure." Miss Wing sank into the seat Briggs had placed for her. "Well, Congressman, I've come on a disagreeable errand."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Briggs, with a smile.

"But with the best intentions in the world," Miss Wing hastened to explain.

"That makes it all right, then."

"It's about— Well, I suppose I might come to the point at once. It's connected with the Transcontinental Railway."

"M'm! Aren't your readers tired of hearing about that?"

Miss Wing shook her head. "Not when there are new and exciting developments," she said, insinuatingly.

"Such as what?"

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Miss Wing waited for a moment. "Well, thus far the papers have spared Mrs. Briggs."

"Mrs. Briggs? What has Mrs. Briggs to do with that railroad?" In spite of his effort to keep his self-control, Douglas Briggs betrayed anger in his voice.

"Simply this," Miss Wing went on, coolly. "I warn you it's very unpleasant. But I—I consider it my duty to tell you."

"Go ahead, then."

Miss Wing fell into a dramatic attitude, her right hand extended and resting on her parasol. "I happen to know that Mr. Franklin West has taken advantage of his hold on you to make love to your wife."

Briggs rose from his seat. "This is the worst yet," he said, in a low voice.

Miss Wing lifted her eyebrows. "You don't believe it?"

"Of course I don't," he replied, contemptuously.

"But I saw him with my own eyes. You're still incredulous, aren't you? It was the night of your ball in Washington. Mr. West was with Mrs. Briggs in the library. I saw him threaten her, and I saw that she was frightened. Knowing

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your relations—excuse me, but I must be frank—knowing your relations, it wasn't hard for me to understand what he was saying."

Briggs looked angrily at his visitor. "Why have you come to me with this vile story?" he cried.

Miss Wing met his looks without flinching. "In the first place, because I thought you ought to know it."

"That was why you waited for six months to tell me?" he said, scornfully.

"No. I waited because of my second reason. I knew that if you were nominated again the information would be more valuable to me. There!"

"How, more valuable?"

"You public men are so dull at times! It's simply that I—well, I don't want to publish the story, though it is a beautiful story. It's not only a splendid sensation, but it's a touch of romance in your stupid politics."

"You want me to pay you not to publish the story—is that it?"

Miss Wing grew serious. "Exactly!"

Briggs smiled coldly. "Well, you've come to the wrong man. I've done a good many things

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in my career that I regret, but I've never yet submitted to blackmail."

"That's a hard word, Mr. Briggs." Miss Wing glared at Briggs, but he made no comment. "You prefer, then, to have your wife's name disgraced, perhaps?" she said.

"I tell you the whole story is a lie!"

"You believe that I've made it up, do you?"

Briggs laughed contemptuously. "Put any construction on my words that you please," and he jammed his hand over the bell on the table beside him. "But let me tell you this, once for all: Not to protect my wife or myself will I be cajoled into paying one cent. Publish your article. Do all the mischief you can!"

Miss Wing rose indignantly. "I'll queer your election for you!" she cried, as Michael entered.

"Show this lady out, Michael," said Briggs, quietly.

XIX

FOR the next ten minutes Douglas Briggs paced his study. He kept repeating to himself that what that woman had said was impossible; she had come simply to blackmail him; she had supposed him to be an easy mark. But it was strange that Helen's discovery of his relations with West should have followed so closely the night of the ball in Washington. Could West have been so cowardly as to expose him to her? It flashed upon Briggs that on the very morning after the ball he had found Helen reading his scrapbooks. Why had she done that? What had been a merely commonplace incident now seemed significant. Was she searching those files for support of West's charges? The idea seemed too hideous, too monstrous. For a moment Briggs had a sensation of having been accused of a crime of which he was innocent. Then he called himself a fool. West had very

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little respect for women, but he was altogether too experienced, too much a man of the world, to insult a woman like Helen.

The only sensible course to pursue was to ignore Miss Wing altogether. If she started the story about him it would merely add one more to the scandals already in circulation. Thus far they did not appear to hurt him very much. The chances were, however, that the woman would not dare to carry out her threat. Besides, Briggs thought with satisfaction, the increased severity of the libel laws was making newspapers more careful of what they said, even about men running for office. He was himself used to hearing similar stories about his colleagues in Washington, and he paid little attention to them. As for Helen, he decided that he would not degrade his wife even by mentioning the matter to her. He returned to his work, however, with bitterness in his mind, and when, an hour later, Helen entered the room, he looked up quickly and said:

“Oh, there’s something I want to ask you.”

He dropped his pen and scanned her face, letting his chin rest on his hands. “Why is it that you were so dead set against having Franklin West come here the other day?”

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She waited, as if carefully preparing an answer. "I would rather not speak of that again, Douglas," she said.

"But I want to speak of it," he insisted. "And I want you to speak of it in plain language. You needn't be afraid of wounding me. Was it because of my connection with him in that railroad business?"

He saw her face flush. Her hand twitched at her belt. "I never liked him," she said. "I told you that."

"Oh!" he cried, impatiently, "this isn't a question of your liking him or disliking him. You dislike a good many people." She looked at him reproachfully. "You know perfectly well you do, even if you don't say so. Don't you suppose I can tell?" He felt suddenly ashamed, and he checked himself. "Excuse me, Helen," he said. "I didn't mean to be disagreeable; but I want you to be open with me in this matter. What's your reason for saying you'd leave here if he came to stay?"

"Don't, Douglas!" Helen's eyes filled with tears. "Please don't ask me. It's better that you shouldn't. I've tried, oh, I've——"

"There is a reason, then," he declared, with

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grim triumph. "Now, I'm going to find out what it is," he added, with determination.

She sank helplessly to the couch. He leaned forward and kept his eyes fixed on her. "Well," he said, "I'm waiting."

"The last time he was at our house in Washington he—he insulted me."

Briggs started back, as if someone had aimed a blow at him. "He insulted you?" he cried, incredulously. "This must be some fancy of yours. West is the most courteous, the most suave—he's *too* suave. What did he say?"

"He said that he was in love with me, he said that he'd been in love with me for years. He said that was why he'd helped you so much. When I tried to call the servants he said they were his servants, in his pay, that you were in his pay—" Helen dropped her head on the couch. Her lips trembled.

Her husband looked at her, dazed. "The scoundrel!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"Perhaps now you can understand why I loathe him so. I always knew what he was. I've always been afraid of him."

Briggs grew suddenly angry. "Why didn't you speak of this before? Why didn't

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you?" He clasped his hands over his face. "God!" he exclaimed.

"I couldn't. He said it would ruin you."

"Ruin me!" Briggs repeated, savagely. Then he looked pityingly at his wife. "And you've kept silent all these months just to protect me?" He turned away. "I might have known what this life would lead to," he went on, as if speaking to himself. "I've dragged myself through the gutter, and I've dragged my family with me."

Helen rose from the couch.

"You ought to have told me," he went on, this time without reproach. "That would have been the only fair thing to do. But it isn't too late," he concluded, grimly.

A look of alarm appeared in her face. "What do you mean, Douglas?"

"Oh, I don't mean that I intend to kill him," he replied, with a scorn that was plainly directed against himself. "We can get along without any heroics."

"What—?" She looked at him with the helplessness of a woman in such a situation. Then she walked toward him. "Please let it all go, Douglas," she said. "No harm has been done—to me, I mean. Don't, don't——"

The Congressman's Wife

“Don’t make a scandal? No, I won’t. I promise you that. You’ve suffered enough out of this thing.” He had an impulse to go forward and embrace her, but a fear of appearing too spectacular checked him. He had the Anglo-Saxon’s horror of acting up to a situation. Besides, in her manner there was something that stung his pride. He could more easily have borne reproaches.

When she had left the room he asked himself what he could do. He felt as helpless as his wife had been a few moments before. Of course, he would break with West; but this contingency did not affect the real question between them. He might thrash the fellow; but even that would be a poor satisfaction. He clearly saw that in this matter there could be no such thing for him as satisfaction. He alone was to blame; he had brought the shame on himself by introducing to his wife a man for whom no honest man or woman could feel respect. He must take his medicine, bitter as it was.

The medicine grew more bitter as the days passed and he did nothing. West, he felt sure, would never enter his house again. When they did meet it would be in Washington, where he

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would let the fellow know that their business deals were at an end. There was no reason why they should not end now; he had done the work, and he had received his pay, he thought, with self-disgust. In future he should keep himself out of any such complications. West had taught him a lesson that would keep him straight for the rest of his life.

Two days before the election Michael announced a visitor. When Douglas Briggs heard the name the expression of his face changed so completely that it found a reflection in Michael's face.

"Where is he?" Briggs asked.

"In the drawing-room, sir. Shall I ask him to step in here?"

"No." Briggs adjusted the collar of his coat. "I'll go in there," he said.

As he was about to leave the room he met his wife, entering from the hall. She looked as if she were about to faint. "I saw him as I came down the stairs," she said. She laid her hand on her husband's shoulder. "Douglas, you won't be foolish, will you?"

He drew her hand away. She noticed that his arm was quivering. "Don't be afraid," he re-

The Congressman's Wife

plied, impatiently. "I'll make short work of him, and there'll be no scene. Think of his coming here!" he added, with a bitter laugh.

She followed him into the hall. When he entered the drawing-room he closed the door behind him. West was standing in front of the mantel; he wore a long frock coat, and a pair of yellow gloves hung from one hand. On seeing Briggs he came forward, smiling, and offering his hand.

"Glad to catch you in," he said. "I came over in a tremendous hurry. I——"

He stopped. Briggs stood in front of him, looking him sharply in the face, with hands clasped behind his back.

"West!"

Franklin West let his hand drop. His eyes showed astonishment. "What's the matter?" he gasped.

Briggs went on, in a lower voice: "West, I have something to say to you, and I might as well say it without any preliminaries. I want to tell you that you're a blackguard."

"What!" West exclaimed.

"I have heard from my wife how you insulted her at our house last Spring."

The Congressman's Wife

"*Insulted* her? It's—it's a mistake. I never——"

Briggs drew nearer West. He looked dangerous. "No. There's no mistake. My wife isn't in the habit of lying. Now, I have just one thing to say to you. That is, get out of here. Don't ever show yourself in my house again. If you do, by God, you'll pay for it!"

West had partly recovered from his bewilderment. "You must be crazy!" he said.

"I shall be if you don't take yourself out of my sight pretty quick."

"You mean to throw me over, then?"

"Yes, you and your whole gang. I've had enough of you. You thought you owned me, didn't you?"

West did not flinch. "It's war between us, then; is it?" he said.

"Call it what you please, but get out!"

West smiled. "Very well, then. I think we understand each other. Now that you've got your nomination again you believe you're strong enough to stand up against us. After we've made you, you're going to knife us. And you make your wife the cloak, the pretext—just as you've used her all along!"

The Congressman's Wife

Douglas seized West by the throat and hurled him to the floor.

The door opened, and Helen stood on the threshold, her face white, her figure trembling. "Douglas!" she whispered.

Briggs released his hold and stood up. "Excuse me," he said, glancing at his wife. "I forgot myself." He glanced at the prostrate figure. "Get out!"

West rose, his face flushed with anger. He walked slowly toward the door. Then he turned. "You'll pay for this!" he said.

XX

ON the night of the election Farley stood at the telephone in Douglas Briggs's library. "Oh, hello! hello!" he called. "Yes, this is Mr. Briggs's house. Yes, Congressman Briggs. What?" He glanced at Guy, who sat at the table in the centre of the room. "They've shut me off!" he said, disgusted. He rang impatiently. Then he rang again. "Hello! Is this Central? Well, I want Central. Who are you? No, I rang off long ago. Well then, ring off, can't you?" He turned toward Guy. "Damn that girl!" Then an exclamation in the telephone caused him to say, hastily, "Oh, excuse me." He smiled at Guy. "Telephones are very corrupting things, aren't they? What?" he continued, with his lips at the transmitter. "What's that about manners? Oh, I *never* had any? Excuse me, but I'm nervous. Yes, nervous. Well, give me the number, won't you? 9-0-7 Spring. Oh, I beg your

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pardon, I thought you were Central." He turned from the transmitter. "I've offended her again. What? Yes. Well, excuse me, please. Well, I'll try. Thank you. Thank heaven, she's rung off! Women ought never to be allowed to get near telephones." He rang again. "Is this Central? Oh, yes, thanks. 9-0-7 Spring, please. Now for a wait!" He leaned weakly against the wall.

Guy rose quickly. "Here, let me hold it for you awhile. You take a rest."

"Thanks." Farley sank into Guy's chair. "I've spent most of the day at that 'phone," he said, with a long sigh.

"Yes, waiting," Guy was saying. "Eh? What a very fresh young person that is, Farley. Yes," he exclaimed, snappishly, "9-0-7. Yes," he repeated, loudly, "Spring. Who do you want, Farley?"

Farley stood up. "Give it to me." As Guy returned to his seat, Farley cried: "Hello! Is Harlowe there? Yes, J. B. Harlowe, your political man. Well, ask him to come to the 'phone. Just listen to the hum of that office, will you?" he said, dreamily. "I can hear the old ticker going tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. The boys must be hustling to-night."

The Congressman's Wife

Guy, who had taken his place at the desk again, rested his head on both hands. "You love newspaper work, don't you, Farley?"

"I love it and I hate it. I wish I'd never gone into it, and I couldn't be happy out of it. It's got into my blood, I suppose. They say it always does if you stay in it long enough. I— Oh, hello, Harlowe! Well, how goes it? Any returns down there? We haven't heard a word for an hour. Pretty quiet? Yes, this is just the time! What district? 235? Good! Funny we don't hear. Oh, yes; just come in. We'll get it by messenger, I suppose. We're ahead by 235 in the Ninth District, Guy. What's that?" Farley listened intently. "Well, I can tell you this—you'll waste your time if you send a man up here. Congressman Briggs is asleep at this minute, and we don't propose to wake him up. He's nearly dead. He's been rushing it without a break since the campaign opened. Seven speeches last night! Think of that! Eh? No, we don't propose to deny the story. We've had a string of reporters here all day long, and we've steered them all off. They haven't even seen Briggs." He burst out laughing. Then he suddenly became serious. "All right. That's the

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way to talk to 'em. Call me up if you get anything important."

"What story?" Guy asked, when Farley had rung off.

"That nasty lie published in the *Chronicle* this morning," Farley replied, dropping into a big chair near the desk.

"Mrs. Briggs hasn't seen it yet," said Guy. "I hope she won't hear anything while she's dining down at the hotel. I told Fanny and her father to be careful."

Farley sighed. "Well, I suppose she must find out some time. You know, down in Washington they've connected her name with that fellow West's for a long time. The idiots!"

"You could see from the way she acted whenever he was around that she hated him," said Guy, with disgust in his voice.

"Oh, they'll say anything about a woman as soon as she becomes conspicuous," Farley replied, with the older man's philosophy.

"But weren't they clever to spring that story on the very day of the election?" Guy went on. "Look here. See what the *Evening Signal* says:

"There is no doubt that the sensational story

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published in the morning papers that Congressman Briggs has had a split with his former backer because of an alleged insult to his wife, and was using the Citizens' Club as a catspaw, has cost him thousands of votes. The reference to Mrs. Briggs may be set down as pure falsehood, introduced to give romantic color to the story. But there is no doubt that personal reasons of considerable interest led Congressman Briggs to seek support of the very men who, till the present campaign, had been his bitterest opponents."

Farley's eyes flashed. "That's a damn lie!"

"Of course it is," Guy exclaimed. "But I only hope all the men at the Citizens' Club will think so."

The door was thrown open, and Briggs entered. His face was pale; his eyes looked inflamed. "Well, boys, how are things going?"

"You got up too soon," Farley replied. "Everything's quiet."

"No news?"

"The Ninth District has gone for you by 235," said Farley.

Briggs lifted his eyebrows. "Two thirty-five?"

The Congressman's Wife

Is that all? I thought we were sure of five hundred at least. Oh, well!"

"Things ought to begin to hum soon," said Guy, rising to give up the seat at the desk. As Briggs took the chair, Michael appeared at the door.

"There's a messenger outside with a letter, sir. He says he was told to give it to you yourself, and to wait for an answer."

"Tell him to come in. You'd better take a rest, Farley," said Briggs. "Don't you newspaper men ever get tired?"

Farley smiled. "Not when there's a little excitement in the air."

A moment later a messenger followed Michael into the room. He was a man of nearly forty, and his uniform gave him an air of youth that his deeply lined face and his figure denied. He looked about aimlessly.

"Congressman Briggs?" he said.

"Yes." Briggs extended his hand.

"Hello! from the Citizens' Club," he exclaimed, as he looked at the envelope. "What's this?" He glanced over the letter. "It's from Griswold. Listen to this, will you? 'We have been talking over that outrageous libel about you

The Congressman's Wife

that appeared in the *Chronicle* this morning, and we think that you ought to take some notice of it. It is too serious to be passed over. We hear that it also appeared in the papers in Boston, Chicago and Washington.' Here, you read the rest, Farley."

Farley read, with Guy looking over his shoulder. When he had finished, he passed the letter back to Briggs. No one spoke.

At last Farley glanced at the uniformed figure. "The messenger is waiting," he said to Briggs.

Briggs swung in his chair and faced the desk. "Sit down here, Guy, and write what I dictate. 'Frazer Griswold, Esquire, the Citizens' Club, Fifth Avenue, New York. My dear Griswold: I see nothing in the article you mention that requires a reply. If I knew the writer, I'd pay him the compliment of thrashing him within an inch of his life.' Give that to the stenographer. Get her to run it off on the typewriter, and I'll sign it."

"Respectfully yours?" Guy asked, busily writing.

Douglas Briggs smiled faintly. "Yes, very respectfully."

As Guy left the room, Farley asked: "Any

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idea who did it, Mr. Briggs? Someone down in Washington, of course."

"I think I know who did it," Briggs replied, quietly.

"Who?"

"No one we can get back at."

"A woman?"

Briggs ran his fingers through his hair. He took a long breath. "Yes," he said, wearily. "Don't you remember Miss Wing? She was at my wife's ball last Spring."

"Yes," Farley replied. "She was disgruntled because she'd been put into a side room for supper with the rest of us newspaper people. Can that have been the reason?"

"No; she had a better reason. But that supper arrangement was a blunder, wasn't it? I've heard from that a dozen times since. And Mrs. Briggs and I knew nothing about it till the supper was all over."

"But she was a friend of West's," Farley went on. "He came to her rescue at the ball, I remember. He used to put himself out to do her favors."

"Yes, it's one of his principles to be particularly civil to newspaper people. I've often heard

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him say that. But she's gone back on him. She throws him down as hard in this article as she does me. Oh, well," Briggs added, stretching out his arms, "I sometimes think that these things, instead of hurting a man, really do him good."

"That's pretty cynical, isn't it?" said Farley, smiling. "It's a little hard on the rest of us in the newspaper line, too."

Briggs rose and began to pace the room. "I'm out of sorts now, Farley. Don't mind what I say. Have you fellows had anything to eat?" he asked, stopping suddenly.

"We had something brought in," said Guy, returning with the typewritten letter. "Didn't have time to go out. Will you sign this?"

"Don't you think you'd better get something?" Farley asked.

Douglas Briggs let the pen fall from his fingers. "No, I have no appetite." Guy gave the messenger the letter and followed him out of the room. "We're helter-skelter here now, aren't we? Well, to-morrow will be our last day in this old place."

"You're giving it up for good, then?" Farley asked.

The Congressman's Wife

"Yes, if we can get rid of it. But we haven't had an offer for it yet. Too bad!" he added, with a sigh.

Farley looked surprised. "Then you don't want to go?"

Douglas Briggs hesitated. "Some of the happiest days of my life have been spent here," he said at last, "and some of the unhappiest, too," he added, turning his head away. "When I came into this house I felt I had reached success. What fools we all are! Here I've been working for years among big interests, and what thought do you suppose has been in my mind all the time? To please my wife, to get money to surround her with beautiful things, to place her in a beautiful house, to give her beautiful dresses to wear. Bah!"

"Well, that isn't altogether a bad ambition," said Farley, cheerfully.

Briggs looked up quickly. "When you've got a wife who's above all these fripperies! Isn't it?"

"But I always think of you as one of the happiest married men I know," said Farley. He began to glance over some papers he had taken from the desk.

"I ought to be. I should be if I weren't a

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fool." He hesitated. "I went into my wife's room the other day while the maids were packing her clothes and I saw a little sealskin coat that I gave her years ago. The sight of that coat brought tears to my eyes. Ever since we were married I'd been telling her that she must have a sealskin. That represented my idea of luxury. It seemed to us then like a romantic dream. Well, I made a little money and I blew it all in on that coat. She's kept it ever since."

Farley was sitting motionless. "That's a very pretty story," he said.

Briggs raised his hand warningly. "But it marked my first step in the wrong direction. All those luxuries, instead of bringing me nearer my wife, have taken me away from her. Sometimes I——"

They heard a voice in the hall and the sound of a girl's laughter. Briggs stopped speaking and listened. A moment later Fanny Wallace ran in, followed by her aunt, her father and Guy Fullerton.

"Here we are at last!" said Fanny. "Missed us?" she went on, and she gave her uncle a kiss on the chin. "Oh, we've had the loveliest dinner! Terrapin and mushrooms and venison and

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—you should have seen dad when he looked over the bill! Now, aren't you sorry you didn't come?" she asked, turning to Guy.

"I was very sorry before you went," Guy replied.

"What did *you* have, Uncle Doug?"

"I didn't have anything."

Fanny stood still. "What?"

Helen interposed, as she was about to unpin her hat: "But I told Martha to have some dinner for you."

"I told her that I was going out, but I fell asleep," Briggs explained.

"I'll see about something." Helen Briggs removed her hat and pinned her veil on it.

Briggs shook his head. "No. I couldn't eat now," he said, with a scowl of exhaustion.

Helen looked alarmed. "Aren't you well?" she asked.

"Perfectly. Don't worry about me. I'll take a biscuit and a glass of wine if I need anything. And if I'm elected we'll all go out and blow ourselves to a supper."

Fanny's eyes shone. "At the Waldorf-Astoria? Good! We'll have some lobster Newburg."

The Congressman's Wife

Jonathan Wallace was drawing off his thick gloves. "Well, everything looks cheerful for you, they say," he remarked to Briggs. "I met Harris, that political friend of yours, and he told me you were going to have a big majority."

"Oh, Harris always was an optimist," said Briggs.

"And dad made him furious," Fanny cried. "He told him that every time a friend of his went into politics he felt like saying, 'There's another good man gone wrong!' and he said that if you got completely snowed under it would be the best thing that could happen to you."

Briggs smiled. "And what did Harris say to that?"

"He didn't say anything. He just looked. Well, I'm going down stairs to see if I can't get something to eat for this gentleman. I'm going to make him eat something. Think of his going without any dinner while we were gorging! Want to come and help, Guy?"

"Take too long."

Fanny looked injured. "Why, there isn't anything for you to do here."

"Well, there will be soon," Guy replied.

"Then Uncle Doug can send for you—or Mr.

The Congressman's Wife

Farley." Fanny seized Guy by the shoulders and pushed him out of the room. "Won't you, Mr. Farley?" she cried, from the hall.

"All right," Farley replied, smiling.

"I think I'll go up and take a nap," said Wallace. "This New York pace is a little too much for me."

As Helen busied herself about the room the telephone rang. Farley answered. "Hello!" he cried. "Who is it? Citizens' Club? All right. I'll wait. Oh, hello, Gilchrist! Yes, this is Mr. Briggs's house. We've sent the reply by messenger. He says the libel isn't worth replying to. I might have told you that." He listened for a few moments. Then he turned to Briggs. "Great excitement over that matter down at the club. They want me to come down."

"Go along, then."

"All right. I'll be down in fifteen minutes," said Farley, into the telephone. As he hung up the receiver he remarked: "I'll make short work of them. Good-night, Mrs. Briggs," he called from the hall. "I'll see you soon again, though. Perhaps I'll bring you news of your husband's election."

XXI

HELEN gathered the wraps she had thrown on the couch and started to leave the room. When she stood at the door her husband said :

“ Are you going upstairs ? ”

“ Yes ; I’m tired,” she replied, without looking round. She stood, however, as if expecting him to speak again.

“ You—you won’t wait till the returns come in ? ”

She turned slightly. “ I’ll come down again,” she replied, glancing at him for an instant.

Briggs walked toward her. “ We’ve been such strangers in the past few weeks,” he said, gently, “ that I should think you might take advantage of this chance for a chat.”

Helen dropped her wraps on a chair. “ I will stay if you wish.”

“ If I wish ! ” he repeated, with quiet bitterness. “ I thought perhaps you’d like to stay.

The Congressman's Wife

You do everything nowadays with the air of a martyr, Helen."

"I sha'n't trouble you much longer, Douglas," she said, lowering her eyes.

"Then there is no way of our coming to an understanding?"

She kept her eyes from him. "We understand each other very well now, I think."

"Now!" he repeated. Helen started to take up the wraps again. He held out his hand. "Wait a minute. I didn't detain you to pick a quarrel. I wanted to make one last appeal to you."

"For what?" she asked.

"I can't stand living like this any longer," he went on, desperately, throwing off all self-restraint. "I can't stand the thought of going back to Washington without you. I'm lonely. I've been lonely for months. You know that as well as I do."

She hesitated, trying to control herself. Then she said, without a trace of feeling in her voice: "You have your work. You have as much as I have."

"You treat me as if you had no regard, no respect, for me. You make me feel like a crim-

The Congressman's Wife

inal. I thought when I threw that man West over——”

She looked him straight in the face. “But why did you do it? Not because he was what you knew him to be, but because he had insulted me. That’s what I can’t forget. All these years you knew what he was.”

They stood looking at each other. “And I was just as bad as he was,” he said, in a low voice. “You mean that, don’t you?”

Helen turned away. “I didn’t say that.”

“And is there nothing I can do to make things right between us?”

“Perhaps, in time, I shall feel different, Douglas.”

He smiled bitterly. “I hope that God isn’t as merciless as good women are!” he said.

She showed resentment at once. “I am not merciless, but I can’t go back to that place to be pointed at, as I should be—to have my name connected with that man’s—” Her voice broke.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean that I have read the article that was published this morning,” she went on, more calmly. “I heard some people at the hotel speak of it while we were waiting to go out into the

The Congressman's Wife

dining-room. They thought I couldn't hear them, but I did hear—every word. They laughed, and they said there was a good deal more behind it than the paper said. I knew what that meant. When they went out I looked at the paper on a file. And yet you can ask me to go back to Washington after that?" she said, with reproach and shame in her voice.

Briggs grew pale. "I hoped you might not hear of it," he said. "I'm sorry, Helen."

She hesitated, but she resolutely kept her face turned from him. Then she gathered her wraps again and left the room.

For a few moments after she disappeared Douglas Briggs stood motionless. Then he sank into the seat beside the desk. Until now he had believed that a reconciliation with his wife was sure to come in time. Now the situation seemed hopeless. He had lost her. This last humiliation made it impossible for her ever to respect him again. In spite of his resolutions of the past few months, he felt that he deserved his punishment. He had not only blighted his own happiness, he had ruined hers. That was the cruelest pain of all. Now he felt, with a bitterness deeper than he had ever known, that without her love, without

The Congressman's Wife

her sympathy and companionship, life had nothing that could give him satisfaction. Why should he go on working? Why not give up his ambitions and his aspirations? They had brought him only disappointment and suffering.

XXII

“JUST as I was leaving I met a messenger-boy with these returns. I opened the envelope.”

Douglas Briggs started. Farley’s cheerful and businesslike voice had given him a sensation of alarm.

“Oh, is that you, Farley?” he said. “All right,” he went on, vaguely. Then he glanced at the yellow paper in Farley’s hand. “What does it say?”

“The returns that we received over the wire from the Ninth District were wrong. They got mixed down at the *Gazette* office.”

“How was that?” Briggs’s voice showed that he was still bewildered.

“The majority of 235 was not for you.”

The full significance of the remark slowly made its way into Douglas Briggs’s mind. “Ah!” He shrugged his shoulders. “That’s a bad sign, isn’t it?”

The Congressman's Wife

"Very bad. I knew they'd been spending money up there."

Briggs sat back in his chair. He had recovered himself now. "Well, they would have spent more than we could; so, perhaps, it's just as well that we didn't spend any."

Farley looked thoughtful. "I think I'll let those fellows rip," he said, slowly. "I'll stay here and watch out for developments."

"Don't do it, Farley," said Briggs, wearily. "It isn't worth while."

Farley looked astonished. "Not worth while?" he repeated.

"No. I don't care whether I'm licked or not. In fact, I think I'd rather be licked."

Farley looked sharply at Briggs. "You're tired out, I guess," he said.

"Yes, I'm mentally, physically, morally exhausted," Briggs replied, passing his hand across his eyes. "Nothing seems worth while to me—not even success. Strange, isn't it? I've staked everything on this election to-night, and if I'm beaten, my political career is done for. And yet I don't care."

"But you won't be beaten," Farley insisted, with a laugh.

The Congressman's Wife

Briggs made a gesture of impatience. "Don't be too sure of that. To tell the truth, Farley, I've felt all along that the fight was hopeless. But I've tried to keep a stiff upper lip. I didn't want you fellows to know how discouraged I was. Look here, Farley, I'm sick of this. If I'm snowed under, I'll only get what I deserve."

"You're pretty tired, Congressman," said Farley, with anxiety in his face. He had seen men break down before under the strain of a political campaign.

"When a man has to go through life without any self-respect he's apt to get pretty tired of himself. And when he has a wife who knows what he is!" Briggs threw back his head and laughed. "God! I suppose there are thousands of men right here in New York who are like that. Their wives know they're blackguards, and they know they know it!"

The two men sat in silence. The look of worry was deepening in Farley's face.

"Farley," Briggs suddenly asked, "how old are you?"

"Thirty-five."

"How does it happen that you aren't married?"

The Congressman's Wife

Farley smiled and flushed. "Oh, I've had other things to think of," he said, evasively.

Douglas Briggs looked at him for a moment. "Do you mean that you've never been in love?"

"No, I didn't mean that," Farley replied, walking to the desk and looking down at some papers, with both hands resting on the edge.

"Then you have been?"

Farley did not stir. "Yes," he replied.

"Seriously?"

Farley nodded.

"What was the matter?"

Farley flushed again, and smiled faintly. "I couldn't get her!"

"Someone else?"

"H'm, m'm."

Briggs looked at Farley for a long time. "And she knows about it?" he asked, gently.

"I think so. I don't know," said Farley, turning away and leaning against the desk with his back toward Briggs.

For several moments neither spoke. They heard the clock tick.

"I suppose there is some sort of justice in this world," Briggs remarked, with a sigh, "but it's pretty hard to see it sometimes."

The Congressman's Wife

"I've thought of that myself," Farley replied, dryly.

"But I'm beginning to find out one thing, Farley. The Almighty often likes to give us what we deserve by letting us have the things we want."

"Sometimes He gives us more than we deserve," said Farley, in a low voice.

"Well, if a man gets it in the neck, it's something to be able to stand up against it. And no matter how much you've had to take, Farley, you can have the satisfaction of knowing what you are."

"That's a pretty poor satisfaction," Farley replied, with a laugh.

"Perhaps you'll care more about it when I tell you what it has done for me. There are two people who have completely changed my views of life lately. One is my wife. You are the other one."

Farley looked up for the first time during the talk. "I?" he said, in surprise.

Briggs nodded. "Till I began to know you, I didn't believe that there were men in the world like you. I had always acted from selfish motives, and I supposed that everyone did."

The Congressman's Wife

"Oh, no," Farley protested.

Briggs lifted his hand. "Don't contradict me. I know what I'm talking about. You think all those reform measures I worked so hard for last year—you think they were unselfish. Well, so they were, in one respect: I didn't get any money out of them. But they were really selfish. I backed them—well, I suppose because I wanted to live up to the good opinion my wife had of me, and I wanted to justify myself for other things I had done." Briggs rose from the chair and met Farley's startled look. "Would you like to know why I say these things to you? It's simply because I can't stand playing a part any longer. I'm a blackguard, Farley. I'm as vile as any of those fellows in Washington you've been fighting against for years. All that woman said in her article is practically true."

"What?" Farley exclaimed, incredulously.

"I was hand in glove with that fellow West till I discovered that he had been making love to Mrs. Briggs. If I hadn't found him out, I shouldn't have had the moral courage to throw him over. Go and tell that, if you like, to your friends at the Citizens' Club."

The Congressman's Wife

"Oh, this is impossible!" said Farley, with distress in his eyes.

"I don't wonder you think so," Briggs replied, smiling faintly. For several moments they stood without speaking. Farley showed in his face that he was running rapidly over everything in the past. The puzzled expression gave place to a look of disappointment and pain.

"Does Mrs. Briggs know of this?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And she—?" He stopped.

"I don't wonder that you can't say it, Farley. No, she hasn't forgiven me. She never will. Now what do you propose to do about it?"

Farley did not stir. His face grew pale. "Nothing," he said at last.

"Of course, I can't expect to have your confidence again," Briggs went on, in a low voice.

"Why not? It seems to me you have a greater claim on it now than ever."

"Do you mean to say that you can have any respect for me after what I've told you?" Briggs asked.

"I know enough about public life to realize what the temptation must have been. And then, I can't see what you've gained by it."

The Congressman's Wife

Douglas Briggs lowered his head. "Thank you, Farley." After a moment, he said: "And are you doing all this for my sake or for—?"

Farley turned away with a smile. "Well, partly for your sake," he replied.

At that moment Fanny darted into the room, followed by Guy. "It's all ready, Uncle Doug!"

"What is?"

"Why, the supper. I got it all up myself—the loveliest scrambled eggs, with tomatoes and some chicken salad and coffee and—well, you'll see. Now please go down."

"All right. You're a good girl, Fanny. But I must have told you that before."

Farley left the room with Briggs. "I'll take a cab down to the club," he said in the hall.

"And tell them just as much as you like," Briggs remarked.

"Trust me for that," said Farley.

XXIII

FANNY looked after the disappearing figures. "They seem kind of worried, don't they?" she said to Guy.

"Oh, you're always imagining things," Guy replied, with masculine impatience.

"You say that just because I'm so much cleverer than you are. At school the girls used to call me the barometer. I could always tell just how they felt."

"Well, if you only knew how I felt at this moment!" Guy exclaimed, ruefully.

Fanny seized both his hands. "Are your hands feverish and clammy? And do you feel cold chills running down your back? That's the way they feel in novels." She began to jump up and down, as she always did in moments of excitement. "Now, what are you going to say? Tell me, quick. He'll be here in two minutes. He said he was coming right down. 'Sh! Here he comes now.'"

The Congressman's Wife

"This is the most infernal town," cried Jonathan Wallace, pulling down his cuffs. "If I lived here I'd go crazy from insomnia." He looked down at Fanny with the resentful air that even the best of fathers sometimes like to assume with their children. "Didn't you say someone wanted to see me?"

"Yes," Fanny replied, with a nervous laugh. Then she added, satirically, patting Guy on the back: "This gentleman. I think I'll get away. Bye-bye, little one." She danced out of the room, waving her hand to the young fellow, who stood, awkward and flushed, trying to think of something to say.

"Well, sir?" Jonathan Wallace walked toward Guy with his right hand thrust into his coat front. At that moment he appeared especially formidable. Guy noticed that his red face, with its large, hooked nose, made him look curiously like a parrot.

"Well—er—you—that is—" Guy began. Then he lapsed into silence. "I wanted to ask you something," he blurted out.

Wallace cleared his throat; a faint twinkle appeared in his left eye. "Well, what is it?"

"The fact is, sir, I want to ask—well, to ask

The Congressman's Wife

a favor of you." Perspiration stood on Guy's forehead.

"Young man, I hope you haven't got into any money difficulties? Well, I shouldn't be surprised if you had. In this political business of yours, you people seem to do nothing but spend money. By Jove! I sometimes think it would pay the country to rent out the Government to a firm of contractors. Well, what is it? Don't be afraid of me; I'm not half so bad as I sound. If you've got into trouble, perhaps I can help you out."

"Thank you, sir, you're very kind," Guy replied. "I appreciate it. But it isn't that."

"Oh, isn't it?" Wallace said, in a tone of relief. "Well, that's all right, then." He acted as if the interview were ended. He had the air of thinking Guy no longer remained in the room.

Guy laughed awkwardly, as if to emphasize his presence. "It's something a good deal more serious."

"Oho!" Wallace looked interested.

"It isn't your money I'm after. It's Fanny."

"Fanny! My little Fanny?" asked Wallace, in a tone of amusement and surprise.

"Yes, sir, your little Fanny," Guy replied, boldly. "I'm in love with her."

The Congressman's Wife

"Well, that's not anything remarkable, after all," said Wallace. "I believe most of the boys down home are. She always was a great hand for the boys. They like her easy way with them, I suppose. Well, I'm very glad you like Fanny. I'm sure it's a compliment to the whole family. You must see a lot of pretty girls during the Winter."

"But I want to marry her," Guy insisted. He did not like the old gentleman's manner, and yet, oddly enough, it reminded him of Fanny's.

"Oh, you do, do you?" Wallace held his right hand over his lips. "Well, that's a pretty serious matter, isn't it? I thought perhaps you were just feeling your way round. Lots of boys down home like to talk to me about Fanny. They're just trying to get the lay of the land, I suppose. But I generally laugh at 'em, an' I tell 'em she's hardly out of her pinafores yet. You see, by the time she gets through college——"

"Through college?" Guy gasped.

Wallace gave the young fellow a severe look. "Yes. Why not? Don't you believe in college education for women? Well, I declare, you college fellows are pretty selfish! You get plenty of education yourselves, but you——"

The Congressman's Wife

"Oh, I don't care anything about that," Guy interrupted. "Let them have all the education they want. But Fanny doesn't want to go to college. She only wants——"

"Eh? What did you say she wanted?" Wallace asked, shrewdly.

"She wants me," said Guy, with as much modesty as he could display.

"Oh, she does, does she? How do you know that?"

Guy was very modest now. "Because she told me so."

"M'm!" said Wallace. The old gentleman's mouth grew tight again. Then he said, with a sly glance at Guy: "How much money have you got?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Guy explained, helplessly, his face turning scarlet.

"What's your income? Are you prepared to support a wife?"

"I—I expect to be—in time."

Wallace smiled, smoothing his thick, white hair. "Well, Fanny was never much of a hand to wait for anything, I can tell you that. How much money do you make?"

Guy shifted his position. "Well, not much at

The Congressman's Wife

present. In fact, it is hardly worth speaking of."

"Any prospects?" Wallace persisted, mercilessly.

"I don't exactly know," Guy replied, feeling that things were going very badly.

"You don't know whether you have any prospects or not?" Wallace exclaimed.

"The fact is——"

"Eh?"

"My affairs are rather mixed up just now."

Wallace looked indignant. "And yet you want to marry my daughter! Well, I like your nerve, young man!"

Fanny suddenly stood between them. She had evidently been listening at the door. "That's just what I like, too, dad. But it doesn't seem to be cutting any ice now." Then she turned to Guy. "I'm ashamed of you! After all our practicing, too! Now look here, dad," she went on, putting her hand on her father's shoulder. "I can't live without Guy." She whispered to the young fellow: "See how much better I do it." "In fact," she went on, in a loud voice and with a languishing glance, "I should die without him."

Wallace pulled down his waistcoat. "Well, go

The Congressman's Wife

ahead and die!" he said, doggedly. "It would be money saved for me."

Fanny's face assumed a look of reproach. "Isn't it awful to hear a father talk like that? Now, dad, you've always blamed me for not being a boy, though everybody knows boys are the most expensive things. Think of the money they spend in college, and all it costs to get 'em out of scrapes! Now, here's a son for you all ready-made, with his wild oats sown and ready to buckle down to hard work."

"Look here," said Wallace. "What does all this mean, anyway?"

"It means," said Fanny, imitating her father's tone, "it means that you've got to give this young man a job."

"What?"

"You've got to give him a job!" Fanny repeated, loudly.

"A job?" Wallace echoed, still mystified.

Fanny nodded vigorously. "M'm—h'm!"

"Where?" Wallace asked, glancing vaguely round the room, as if searching for a spot where Guy might be safely employed.

"In the factory," said Fanny, decisively.

Wallace pointed toward Guy, who stood look-

The Congressman's Wife

ing helpless and foolish. He felt as children do when their mothers discuss in their presence their appearance and their infantile diseases. "What? Him?" Wallace asked.

"Yes, *him*," Fanny declared, resentfully. "Now don't you go and make fun of your future son-in-law, dad."

Wallace was still struggling with astonishment, either real or assumed. "In the factory?"

"Yes," said Fanny, lifting her eyebrows.

Wallace faced Guy. "You're willing to soil those white hands of yours, sir?"

Guy laughed and blushed, instinctively putting his hands behind him. "Oh, yes," he replied. "Glad of the chance."

Wallace still appeared incredulous. "And take ten dollars a week for the first year?"

Fanny dashed toward Guy and threw her arm protectingly across his shoulders. "What?" she exclaimed, indignantly. "My precious! Ten dollars a week!"

"I'll take anything you think I'm worth, sir," said Guy, over her head.

"With his intellect, and all he learned at Harvard!" Fanny protested. "Never, dad! You must give him twenty-five, or I'll cast you off!"

The Congressman's Wife

"If you show that there's any good stuff in you, I may give you fifteen after three months," said Wallace.

"Thank you, sir," said Guy, humbly.

Fanny dropped her arm, clasped her hands and, with lowered head, she walked toward her father.

"Will you give us your blessing, sir?" she asked.

"I'll send you to bed if you don't behave yourself," Wallace replied. Then he went on, with a warning gesture: "And let me tell you one thing. There's to be no engagement between you two people for a year. Do you understand that?"

Fanny looked crestfallen, but in a moment she brightened. Guy bowed respectfully. He seemed glad to accept any terms that would secure Fanny for him. He hadn't expected such luck as this.

"Perhaps it's just as well," said Fanny philosophically, as her father started to leave the room. "He couldn't afford to buy a ring, anyway."

XXIV

As soon as Wallace had closed the door, Fanny leaped into Guy's arms.

"Oh, you were perfect!" she cried. "I'm glad you didn't do as we practised, after all."

Guy kissed her rapturously. "Oh, Fan, I hope you won't get sick of me!" he said.

The telephone rang, and Fanny had to postpone her reply. "There, go and attend to business," she said, giving Guy a push. She watched him as he held the receiver at his ear.

"Hello! Yes. Oh, Farley. What? Mr. Briggs is still downstairs. 500? Well, that looks bad, doesn't it? Do you mean to say they think he's—? Oh, impossible!"

"What's impossible?" Fanny cried.

Guy listened intently, ignoring her. "No. I think you'd better come here. He'll want you. I'll tell him."

"Tell him what?" said Fanny.

The Congressman's Wife

"Good-bye." Guy rang off.

"Why don't you answer me? Tell him what?"

Fanny heard footsteps in the hall.

"Well, my dear," said Douglas Briggs, opening the door, "I feel a good deal better."

Fanny held her finger at her lips. "'Sh! Guy has something to tell."

Briggs observed that Guy was waiting for a chance to speak. "News?" he asked, nervously.

Guy nodded. "They say down at the Citizens' Club that things are looking rather bad."

Briggs looked steadily at the boy. "Who told you?"

"Farley," Guy replied.

"Ah!" Briggs sank into a chair. "If Farley is losing courage—! Well, never mind."

"But you aren't beaten yet, Uncle Doug," Fanny exclaimed, resolutely.

"What difference does it make—now or two years from now? It's only a question of time."

Michael tapped on the door and entered with the soft step of one bearing important news. "A boy just come in with this telegram, sir."

"Open it, Guy," said Briggs.

Guy tore the envelope. "These are the figures

The Congressman's Wife

Farley gave me," he said. He passed the telegram to Briggs.

"It's all up with me!" said Briggs, just as Helen appeared.

"But they haven't heard yet from the Nineteenth District," Guy interposed. "We can count on a two-hundred majority there."

"No; West has spent more money there than anywhere else. I shall be surprised if—" Briggs stopped at the sound of the telephone bell. Guy darted for the receiver.

"Oh, hello, hello! Is that you, Farley? What? Oh, Bradley. This isn't the Citizens' Club, then? Oh, the *Gazette*! No, Farley isn't here, but he'll be here in a minute. He's tearing over from the club in a cab. What district? The Nineteenth? We've been waiting for that. How many?"

Guy listened; they all listened. "Well, good-bye. Thank you. Good-bye. I'll tell him." Guy turned from the telephone and faced the others.

"For goodness' sake, speak!" cried Fanny.

Guy's mouth twitched. "I guess it's all over, Mr. Briggs."

"How much majority in the Nineteenth?" Briggs asked.

The Congressman's Wife

"Over three hundred against us."

Briggs drew a long breath. "I'm snowed under, buried! This is the last of me! Oh, well!"

Fanny burst out crying. "I think it's a shame, and the awful things you see in Washington who go to Congress year after year, till they're ready to drop!" She started to leave the room. Guy started in pursuit with the hope of comforting her. At the door she met Farley, entering.

"Hello, what's the matter, Miss Fanny?" he asked.

"Oh, go and find out!" cried Fanny, dashing into the hall and up the stairs, leaving Guy disconsolate in the hall.

"Come in, Farley," said Briggs.

"You've heard the news, then?" Farley asked.

"Yes."

"They told me just as I was getting into the cab." Farley smiled at Helen. "Well, we made a good fight, Mrs. Briggs. Too bad all our work was thrown away!"

"It wasn't, Farley. That is, yours wasn't," said Briggs. "And before you and my wife, I can say what I shouldn't dare to say to anyone else. I'm glad I'm beaten. I'm glad to be out

The Congressman's Wife

of it. Of course, I am out of it now for good. After such a crushing defeat and with my record, I can never get back." He saw that Farley was about to protest. "Oh, don't, Farley! Even if I could I don't want to. I feel as if all my energy and ambition were gone."

"They'll come back after you've got rested," Farley remarked. "You're only tired out. You've been working on your nerves for weeks. Now I'm going to say good-night." He offered his hand to Helen. "Good-night, Mrs. Briggs."

"Good-night," said Helen.

Farley stepped back to let Michael speak to Briggs.

"There's a gentleman in the reception room, sir, that wants to see you. He says he comes from the *Chronicle*."

Douglas Briggs looked at the card. His lip curled. "From the *Chronicle*?" he said, contemptuously. "Well, we mustn't refuse the *Chronicle*. I suppose he's come to see how I've taken my defeat." He rose, adjusted his frock coat and threw back his shoulders. "You stay here, Farley, till I come back," he said.

"All right." Michael followed Briggs from the room, leaving Farley and Helen together.

The Congressman's Wife

"Mr. Briggs will be all right after he's had a rest from the strain," said Farley.

"I hope so," Helen sighed. "It's a relief that it's over—such a relief."

"And of course," Farley went on, "Mr. Briggs will change his mind about going out of politics."

"Do you think so?" Helen betrayed surprise in her tone.

"We need men like him in Washington."

Helen did not speak. She held her head down.

"Mrs. Briggs!"

Helen kept her face hidden.

"I hope you'll pardon me if I speak of something—something that is—well, that concerns you very closely. I do it only because I believe in Mr. Briggs, and because I care for his future and for his happiness, and for yours, if you'll let me say so."

"Thank you, Mr. Farley," said Helen, softly. "You've been very good to Douglas. He has often spoken of all you've done."

"Oh, that's nothing. But—he has told me all about that man West."

Helen looked up, startled.

"He hasn't spared himself. He has even made the case out worse than it is."

The Congressman's Wife

"He has told you?" Helen repeated.

Farley nodded.

"Of his own accord?"

"Yes."

"And you still—? You——?"

"Yes, I believe in him. I believe he has been punished for whatever wrong he has done. And I can't see why a man's whole future should be spoiled because he has made a mistake at the start. There are plenty of men in public life who have made mistakes like his—men who were young and inexperienced. Some of them have since done fine work."

"Why have you spoken to me about this, Mr. Farley?"

"Because—well, because I know—that is, I suspect, from what Mr. Briggs has said, that you're not in sympathy with his public life."

"That is true. I haven't been, lately."

"And I thought perhaps if you looked at things a little differently——"

"I shouldn't be so harsh?" Helen interrupted, her face flushing. "That is what you mean, Mr. Farley, isn't it?"

"No, not that," Farley replied, growing more embarrassed. "I thought perhaps you'd help

The Congressman's Wife

him to get back where he belongs, that's all. It's going to be a hard fight. Most men wouldn't have the nerve to make it. But he has, if you'll help him."

Helen's eyes filled with tears. "You make me ashamed, Mr. Farley. If you can forgive him, after all you've done for him——"

Farley laughed. "Oh, I haven't done half so much as you think, Mrs. Briggs. I'll feel repaid if you'll only make him see that he ought to stay in the fight." He heard steps in the hall and Briggs's voice speaking to the reporter. A few moments later, Briggs entered, looking more cheerful.

"Well, it wasn't half so bad as I thought. Nice fellow. One of those young college men. He was so ashamed of his assignment I had hard work to put him at his ease."

Farley offered his hand.

"Now I must be off, Mrs. Briggs."

"Come in to-morrow, Farley," said Briggs. "I want to have a talk with you."

XXV

WHEN Farley had left the room Briggs sank on the couch. Now that he was alone with Helen, all his buoyancy disappeared. His face looked haggard; the hard lines around his mouth deepened.

Helen rose and sat beside him. "Douglas," she said.

He did not reply.

"I couldn't say anything while they were here," Helen went on, "but I'm sorry. Perhaps it's all for the best."

He drew away from her. "All for the best!" he repeated, hopelessly. "That's a poor consolation. Do you know what it means to me? It means that I've lost my chance of redeeming myself. That's the only reason why I wanted to be elected. I was sincere when I said I was sick of the life. But I thought if I could only go back there as an honest man and keep straight, then I could come to you and tell you I'd tried to make up for what I had done."

The Congressman's Wife

"I understand that, Douglas," Helen replied.

"But it is all right now."

"How is it all right?"

"With me, I mean. I love you all the more because you've failed."

He leaned forward, with his hands between his knees. "When I have nothing to offer you, Helen," he said, "not even a clean reputation—when I'm ruined and disgraced, with hardly a dollar in the world?"

"You aren't ruined and disgraced. It's foolish to speak so. You're only forty-two. Why, you're just beginning, Douglas! And there's my property, Douglas, my two thousand a year. That will be something to start on. And you have your practice."

"We'll have to give up this house," he said, almost in a whisper.

Helen lifted her head. Her eyes shone. "What difference does it make, Douglas? I can be happy with you anywhere."

For a moment he sat without moving. Then he let his hand rest on hers. Suddenly he lifted her hand and pressed it to his lips. He rose quickly and walked to the back of the room, where he stood trying to control himself. At last he said:

The Congressman's Wife

"I don't deserve to have you, Helen."

"And there's Mr. Burrell, Douglas. There's his law case."

"True. I had forgotten about that. Oh, I guess I've some fight left in me, dear." He walked back and sat beside her. "Only—I need you now more than ever."

"And I'm going to be more to you, Douglas. I've just been talking with Mr. Farley. He has made me see things so differently! I've been selfish, Douglas, and—and harsh with you. I've never taken enough interest in your work. I've allowed you to bear all the burdens. That's why I lost your confidence. But in future we're going to share everything, aren't we? And one thing, dear, you aren't going to give up ever. You'll stay in politics, and we'll go back to Washington some day."

Briggs looked away and smiled.

"Ah, I know when I've had enough," he replied, shaking his head.

"No. You haven't had enough. You'll have to go back, to please me."

He turned to her again and looked into her face. Then he took her in his arms and drew her close to him.

XXVI

THE next day Douglas Briggs received a large number of telegrams; but only one contained a message that interested him: "Coming down with wife and two girls to get you to take that law case." He passed the yellow slip to his wife. "Well, that looks promising, doesn't it?" he said.

The following morning the family arrived. "It seems awful, coming away without Carrie Cora," said Mrs. Burrell. "I declare I didn't hardly have the courage to set out. I said to Father—" Here the old lady glanced quickly at her daughter and then at her husband and Douglas Briggs. She hesitated. Then she ran over to where Helen was sitting and whispered in her ear.

"Oh!" Helen exclaimed, laughing and flushing. "Isn't that splendid?"

"Well, we're all feelin' kind of happy," said

The Congressman's Wife

Burrell, and the girls turned quickly to the window, while their mother held a whispered conversation with her hostess. Finally, she said aloud: "An' now I want to have a good talk with you alone. I don't want pa or the girls or even you, Mr. Briggs, to hear one word."

"All right," said Briggs, cheerfully, and he pretended to dash for the door.

"Well, ain't he wonderful?" exclaimed Mrs. Burrell. "I knew he'd be just like that. He's always the same, ain't he?"

"Well, you didn't think that such a little thing as an election was going to put me out, did you?" Briggs asked.

"The children are upstairs," Helen explained, "in the library."

"I'll take them up," said Briggs quickly, "and then Burrell and I will go where we can have a talk and a little—" He looked mockingly at Mrs. Burrell. "Oh, I forgot."

"Go ahead!" the old woman cried with a wave of the hand. "I feel so happy that I can't oppose anybody anything. I kind of think I've done too much opposin' in my life."

As soon as the door had closed behind the others, Mrs. Burrell embraced Helen wildly, the

The Congressman's Wife

tears filling her eyes. "I declare I did feel sorry for your husband's failin' in re-election. I did want him to succeed so. Father says I'm altogether too ambitious for other people. He says I'm the one that made him run for Congress. Well, he was mighty glad not to be up again. But ain't it wonderful about Carrie Cora? When I think of the way I treated that girl I almost feel as if I'd die of shame. An' it's you that kept me from makin' a fool of myself and from spoilin' her chances of bein' happy. An' if she ain't the happiest thing! An' Rufus! Well, since they got married, he ain't hardly let her out of his sight, except when he's away to work. Father's thinkin' of settin' him up in business of his own. I guess he'll be a rich man some day, from what father says. That only shows you never can tell. But he gives all the credit to Carrie Cora. He says if he didn't have her he wouldn't take the trouble to go on workin'. He says queer things sometimes. He's kind of notional, I guess." Mrs. Burrell hesitated, drawing a deep breath. "But that ain't what I come to talk to you about, though the two girls say I'm runnin' on about Carrie Cora all the time. They pretend to be jealous; but they're just as fond of her as they can be.

The Congressman's Wife

And as for pa! Why, he spends most of his evenin's down there. They've got a lovely home. I wish you could see their parlor carpet. But I guess I've told you about it. Well, pa spends most of his evenin's with them, smokin' an' talkin'. I tell him they must be awful sick of havin' him. Well"—Mrs. Burrell gasped, and a fine perspiration broke out on her cheeks—"where am I? I do get mixed up so lately. Oh, yes. The girls. Well, now that Carrie Cora's all settled, the girls are just crazy to get away again. They were dreadfully disappointed in their first Winter in Washington; and they are crazy to go back there with you. Now, what do you think?" Mrs. Burrell exclaimed, her face flushing violently.

"With me?" Helen said, in astonishment.

Mrs. Burrell nodded. "Now, I wouldn't 'ave heard of it if pa—well, pa knows everything—well, if pa hadn't told me Mr. Briggs—well, that he was in some trouble about money. There, I suppose you'll think I'm awful!"

"Oh, no," Helen protested, feeling her own face flush.

"Pa just adores Mr. Briggs, an' he'd like nothin' better than to help him out. Well, we talked it over—you see." Mrs. Burrell went on, twisting

The Congressman's Wife

in her seat, "when the two girls went to the Misses Parlins' school here, we paid a thousand dollars a piece for 'em. An' then the extras amounted to a lot more, drivin', and the theatre, and all that. They used to go to the theatre every week. It must have been comical to see 'em walkin' down the aisle, two by two. Emmeline used to write to us about it. She hated it. Well, I guess pa spent most five thousand dollars on the girls that year they were here in New York. But we didn't mind, as long as they was happy. But the trouble was they wasn't happy. They didn't have hardly a minute to themselves. They didn't feel free. That's it. Now, if they was with you, it would be different. They'd meet all the lovely people you know. That is, if you're goin' to go back to Washington?" Mrs. Burrell asked with swift acuteness.

"Yes, I shall go back," Helen replied, flushing.

"And you'll be in that lovely home again?" Mrs. Burrell asked, giving Helen a sharp look.

"No. That has been leased already," Helen replied, without flinching. "We shall take another house—a smaller one."

Mrs. Burrell looked embarrassed. "When pa heard the news"—Mrs. Burrell impressively low-

The Congressman's Wife

ered her voice—"about the election, I mean, he just jumped up an' down. You know he thinks Mr. Briggs ought to be the greatest lawyer in the country at this minute. He hopes he'll keep out of politics after he finishes this term in Congress."

Helen sighed. "But it's hard, beginning all over again," she said politely.

"Well, pa says," Mrs. Burrell went on with a knowing look, "that if he takes his patent-cases he'll have enough to keep him busy for a whole year, possibly two years. Ain't that splendid? An' it seemed kind of like Providence, the whole thing, for us. If you only would take the girls," Mrs. Burrell pleaded.

"And what will *you* do?" Helen asked with a smile.

"Well, I'll stay home, just where I belong, as father's always sayin'. I guess I can be more comfortable there than anywhere else. We've got a new furnace, an' we've had the sittin'-room fixed over, and it does seem a shame to shut up that big lovely house again. Why, how the sun does stream into our sittin'-room windows! They're the old-fashioned kind, you know; they run way down to the floor. Father'll have to be down in Washington part of the time, of course,

The Congressman's Wife

an' he can be comfortable at the hotel, especially if the girls are within reach. But I'm determined to stay near Carrie Cora."

Helen Briggs was so startled by Mrs. Burrell's proposition that the thought of it made her abstracted. As the old lady rattled on about her own affairs, she noticed Helen's abstraction. Suddenly she stopped, and, folding her hands in her lap, she exclaimed: "I suppose you think I'm awful!"

Helen smiled and shook her head. "Why should I think you are awful, Mrs. Burrell?"

"Oh, forcin' my children on you," the old lady replied, with a helplessness that made Helen speak out frankly.

"It may be that we shall be glad to take the girls. It may be Providential for us. We need money now more than we've ever needed it."

"Well, we've got plenty of *that!*" Mrs. Burrell exclaimed with a nervous laugh. "I tell father——"

"And if Douglas is willing," Helen Briggs went on, "if he's willing that I should take the responsibility——"

At that moment Douglas Briggs returned with

The Congressman's Wife

the old gentleman, whose face was shining with happiness.

“ Well, mother, I feel as if a big load was taken off my mind.”

“ Oh, Mr. Briggs,” the old lady broke out, “ I knew a talk with you would make my husband feel right. He’s been groanin’ all Summer because he couldn’t get at you. He ain’t no hand at writin’ letters, an’ I jest wouldn’t let him go down to Washington while the weather was so hot. It was bad enough down to Auburn, though, as I tell everybody at home, no matter how hot it is, there’s always a cool spot in our house. You see, I keep the house closed all day long jest so’s the heat can’t get in.” Mrs. Burrell began to laugh. “ Father often takes his paper an’ goes down cellar. He says it’s as good as goin’ into an ice-house. But I’m awful afraid he’ll catch his death of cold, an’ I know it’s bad for his rheumatism.”

By this time Burrell had sunk into one of the big chairs and was waiting patiently for his wife to cease.

“ Well, ma,” he finally interrupted, “ suppose you let me get a word in. Mr. Briggs is goin’ to take the case, an’ he’s goin’ to look after all my

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business here in New York. He says he ain't competent to do it, an' he says I ain't got no right to put so much trust in him. He says he ain't nothin' but a tricky politician. I s'pose the truth is, he feels kind of too stuck up to get down to every-day business."

They all laughed, and Mrs. Burrell exclaimed: "Well, stuck up is about the last thing I'd ever think of you, Mr. Briggs. Now if you'd 'a' said that about some of those other politicians we used to see down to Washington, Alpheus!"

Mrs. Burrell looked from her husband to her hostess, and then at Douglas Briggs. "Well, if you two men have finished your business, I s'pose we've got to go." She turned appealingly to Helen, as if hoping to be urged to stay.

"This time you'll have to come to dinner," said Helen.

"Oh, that's all arranged," said Briggs easily. "They're coming to-night." As Mrs. Burrell was about to protest, he held up his hands. "Now, don't say a word. Everything's settled!"

Mrs. Burrell looked at Helen with a comic expression of despair. "Well, I think it's a shame!" she said, her face shining with pleasure.

"Now I'll go and get those girls of yours,"

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said Briggs, walking into the hall. "I left them romping with the children. I thought the children would tear them to pieces."

When the Burrells had left, Helen walked into the library with her husband. Her face looked puzzled.

"Did Mr. Burrell talk with you about the girls?" she asked.

Briggs sank heavily into a chair. "Yes, he told me all about it. He seemed a good deal ashamed. Poor old man! And yet I could see that he was making them an excuse for offering me more money."

"He's been offering you money, then?" Helen asked, her face growing slightly paler.

"Oh, yes. He wants to pay me absurdly for taking that law-case and looking after his affairs here. There's really a good deal to be done; but he won't be satisfied unless I agree to fleece him," Briggs concluded with a laugh.

For several moments they sat in silence. Then Briggs broke out: "He's been fooled so often, he says I'm the only man in the world he can trust. I felt like a hypocrite, Helen. Honestly, I thought of asking him to go to you and to get you to tell him all about me. I didn't have the nerve to tell

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him the truth myself. It would have been easier," he added whimsically, "to put that on you."

"I shouldn't have found it very hard, Douglas," she said with a smile.

"You wouldn't?"

She shook her head. "And I'm afraid you're growing morbid about the past, dear. It's over, and why think about it?"

"I have to think about it now and then," he said grimly. He pressed his hand against his forehead. "Of course, I know what you mean. I ought to think about the future—and I do—I think of it—well, most of the time." He rose nervously and began to walk up and down the room. "Somehow those people make me realize what we're up against."

"It would help us out if we were to have the girls with us in Washington," said Helen conservatively.

An expression of annoyance and disgust appeared in his face. "But why should we have our home invaded like that? Why should you have to—?" He turned away angrily.

"I shouldn't mind, dear. It really would make things easier for me."

"Easier?"

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Helen bowed her head. "We could have more servants. And I should—I should worry less about the expense."

"Oh, but Helen, our privacy—our privacy—" he pleaded.

"I know. But we shall appreciate it all the more when"—she smiled faintly—"when we've earned it."

He sighed heavily. "Well, we haven't had much privacy in the last few years, have we? It's almost as if we'd been living in the public square," he added bitterly.

They agreed not to discuss the matter again for a few hours. "If you like you can take a week or so to think it over," said Briggs, and from his tone his wife knew that he wished her to agree.

"It seems too good a chance to lose," she said. "And the girls are nice girls, too," she went on, to encourage him.

He made a wry face, and walked over and kissed her. "Let us not decide for a few days anyway."

Nevertheless, as he went down town that day Douglas Briggs felt more encouraged than he had been for many months.

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At any rate, Burrell would put him in the way of having a little money; during the past few weeks he had been so straitened that he hardly knew where to turn. He considered himself reduced to an extremity when he began seriously to think of appealing to his wife. He was glad to be able to assure himself it was not pride that made the thought of appealing to her distressing; it was the fear that she should be worried by discovering he was so harassed; like a woman, the solution would seem to her far more serious than it really was. Even now, he told himself that he must be careful in talking over the taking into the family of the two girls; he must not let her realize what an immense help the money would be to them.

That night when he returned home, he found Helen already dressed for dinner. He noticed that she looked unusually happy.

"Douglas," she said.

"Well?"

"Why didn't you tell me how pressed you were for money?"

He looked at her with astonishment in his face. "What?" he exclaimed, and in the exclamation he was conscious of the continuation of his old

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habit of deceit. He tried to atone for it in his consciousness by saying: "Well, dear, you are a wonder. What did I say this morning?"

"It wasn't what you said. It was your being willing to consider the proposition at all. Now, of course, we must take the girls. I've thought it all over, and I've even decided which rooms to give them."

He walked toward her and kissed her. "It will only be for one Winter, dear," he said, assuming, in spite of the humility he felt, his usual attitude of superiority. "By that time I'll be established in practice again and we'll have all the money we want."

She drew away from him, and he knew that in some subtle way he had pained her. He could not clearly divine that she felt there was something remotely wrong, almost criminal, in his assuming money could be so easily earned. But it must have been some vague sense of her feeling that prompted him to add: "I'll have to work like the devil, dear. But it will be worth fighting for." He sighed heavily. "And then when we get the money," he went on whimsically, "we'll be in a position to laugh at the people we're afraid of now. We'll go and live plainly in the country

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as soon as we can afford to pretend that we're poor."

She shook her head. "You wouldn't be happy, Douglas," she said simply, and he felt a pang. It was as if her look had penetrated his inner consciousness. "We must go on as we've begun."

He knew that what she meant was wholly in unison with his own thought; but, for an instant, he felt the sinister interpretation; it was almost like a judgment on him. But he quickly recognized his injustice, and he walked over to her and placed both hands on her shoulders. "Do you love me, Helen?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"Yes, Douglas," she replied, and he detected the note of pain in her voice. She leaned toward him. "I love you always, Douglas, always."

He held her closely in his arms. "My poor little wife," he said, but he hardly knew why he should have felt pathos in the situation.

She drew away from him and he saw the tears in her eyes.

"I'm a hard man to live with in some ways, Helen," he said with a sincerity that astonished him. It made her respond at once.

"Oh, no, Douglas!" she exclaimed, in a clear voice, that told him she had recovered from her

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little emotional attack and had become her wholesome self again. With his habit of generalizing he instantly reflected that it must be a terrible thing for a man to live with an emotional woman.

That night it was arranged that the Burrell girls, instead of going home with their father and mother, should go to Mrs. Briggs for the Winter. Burrell insisted upon putting the matter on the most rigid business basis, and offered Helen Briggs a recompense in money that she considered wholly out of proportion to what was just. Briggs maintained in the discussion an air of jocular remoteness and, in spite of Helen's objection, Burrell established his own conditions. When they had finally left the house, Briggs tried to give the matter a comic aspect by telling his wife that he knew the old lady expected her to get husbands for the two girls. "I suppose we'll have the house filled with young scamps of fortune-hunters," he said. "You'll have a fine time chaperoning the poor girls."

Helen knew that he was trying to hide the chagrin he felt. "I really sha'n't mind, Douglas," and she was sorry she could not tell him in words how happy it made her to be able to help him. But she had to be careful now not to hurt the pride

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that she could see quivering beneath his air of humorous indifference.

Two days later the girls came to the house to stay until their friends should go to Washington. Briggs wrote to an agent, and a month later he was established with his family in a house that would have seemed ideally comfortable but for the taste of luxury his own house in Washington had given him. Briggs saw that his fears regarding the Burrell girls had been unnecessary. Toward Helen they maintained an air of worshipful devotion that greatly amused him, and they seemed to enjoy being with the children, too. He saw that, in spite of their acquired worldly air, they were really simple country girls, easily abashed and genuinely simple and kind. He grew interested in them and he began to wonder, as he often did in the case of unattached girls, if he could not help them to find husbands. It was a pleasure to him to come home and to hear from Helen about her outings or her calls with the girls during the day. He realized with astonishment that till now Helen had led a rather restricted life, and that he had taken an unconsciously scornful interest in the things she did. At dinner he really enjoyed hearing the girls talk about the people

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they had met during the day, about the art-exhibits and the teas they had been at, and about the books they had read and the plays they had seen or the operas they had heard. The comments of his wife regarding the books and the plays and the operas surprised him, and made him realize that she lived in a world from which he was shut out. He had been accusing her world of narrowness, but in reality the narrowness existed chiefly in his own mind. At moments he felt a kind of jealousy of her; at other times he was ashamed of the superior attitude he had taken toward her, and he wondered if she had recognized it. The thought of the possibility that she had known of it all along gave a sudden pause to his consciousness like a symptom of sickness.

Briggs took an impersonal interest in his new humility, as he did in everything that related to the workings of his own mind. As far as he could follow them, he assured himself that he had always wished to understand his own nature just as it was, without any self-praise or palliation; and yet he had begun to make a complete revision of his opinion of himself. He wondered how far the change could be due to the change that he felt

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in the attitude toward him of other men. Hitherto, among men he had always been treated with consideration; now he knew himself to be regarded as a man who, if he had not failed, had not quite succeeded, and, if he had not been smirched in character, was still marked with the suspicion of taint. Most of all he dreaded betraying in his manner his knowledge of this change. He had seen so many men betray the consciousness of their own weakness. Especially he tried to avoid giving the least suggestion of bravado. He reflected on the fickleness of good opinion; he had basked in the sunshine of good opinion all his life; when it was withdrawn he felt chilled and depressed. It was when he met some of the men who had treated him with special deference and who now addressed him with easy equality or with indifference, or, as occasionally happened, with cold formality, that he felt most deeply his humiliation. But at these times he felt a swift reaction that found expression in a stubborn assertion of courage. After all, he reflected grimly, it paid to be on the level. The important thing was not to be contemptuous to slights, but to be so established in the sense of being right, that slights could not wound. He saw now that his previous

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attitude toward life had been false and unstable; it had never been established on rock-bottom.

In his humiliation, it was a comfort to know that there were two people in the world who knew him just as he was. Those others who despised him, believed he was worse than he could possibly have been. His wife and William Farley believed in him and counted on him. To Mr. Farley, whom he saw every day, he confided nearly all his affairs. Once he had prided himself on standing alone, trusting no one; now it helped him to place his perplexities before that quiet and shrewd intelligence. Once he urged Farley to study law and go into partnership with him, and he laughed when the journalist held up his hand in protest. He envied Farley's unswerving devotion to ideals of service that were so like his own in his best moods, and so unlike most of the realities that he achieved. It was Mr. Farley's advice that made him decide, after his return to New York, to keep out of active politics for a couple of years. He needed time for readjustment, he said jocosely to himself. In two years he would be ready to make a fresh start. They would be hard years, for already he missed the excitement and the sense of being associated in the large interests that politics had

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given him. Meanwhile, he kept assuring himself that he was young; a man's best work in life was done after his fortieth year. Already, as he had observed with pleasure and hope, some of the newspapers were lamenting his withdrawal from politics, and were referring to some of his past services, from which he had expected no return. Here, too, he found material for his philosophy. There were men in political life who did practically nothing for which they could claim honorable credit, and who were constantly engaged in schemes either for defrauding the government or for using their opportunities for private gain. So far as he could see they suffered neither from remorse or lack of self-respect or from the resentment of their constituents. But he was not one of them. It was clear to him now that he must keep straight or take his medicine, and he assured himself that he had already had medicine enough.

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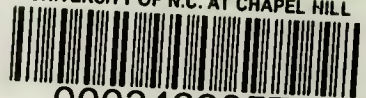
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